

SERVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT: A MODEL FOR INTEGRATING
CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY WITH MINISTRY ACTIVITY AT THE FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH OF FLUSHING, NY

By

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this project was the development and implementation of a model of personal spiritual formation that afforded the activity-oriented Christians at the First Baptist Church of Flushing a means to live more spiritually centered lives.

To foster this spiritual centeredness, a spiritual formation handbook was developed using a modified version of the ancient practice of the daily office. The handbook was more rigorous than the typical “quiet time” commonly used by many Evangelicals. It afforded participants the opportunity to pause three times in a day to enter the presence of God through a variety of spiritual disciplines and exercises. A pilot group consisting of 42 members from the church was invited to use the handbook for a period of three months as a means of living more spiritually centered lives. Their feedback at a half-day retreat at the end of the project demonstrated that the handbook was a valuable instrument for them.

Although the handbook was the project’s core, other methods were used to awaken the entire congregation to the need to live spiritually centered lives to the glory of God, including a sermon series on the spiritual disciplines, the introduction of contemplative elements into our corporate worship experience, and the creation of a contemplative worship experience on the evening of Holy Thursday.

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CHAPTER 1

A GLOBAL CHURCH LIVING AND SERVING IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE

About The First Baptist Church of Flushing

Our Tradition

First Baptist Church belongs to the Conservative Baptist Association of America. Conservative Baptists are a loosely allied family of churches situated chiefly across the northern tier of the United States, combining conservative theology with missionary zeal. The Conservative Baptists broke away from the Northern (now the American) Baptist Convention in 1943 for what they deemed “liberal” theology. The Conservative Baptists’ commitment to missions and theology can be seen in its having both home and foreign missions societies, and its own seminaries in Denver, Portland, and in several cities in the Northeast.¹ As a church, we embrace the core values of the Conservative Baptist Association. It is not surprising, then, that First Baptist Church historically has emphasized biblical communication and missions both locally and globally.

Our Diversity

First Baptist Church is affectionately called “heaven’s mirror,” not because we are a perfect replica of heaven, but because our church is a reflection of the diverse multitude

¹ Bruce Shelley, *A History of Conservative Baptists* (Wheaton, Illinois: Conservative Baptist Press, 1971), 1.

of people the Apostle John saw standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.² Around that throne in heaven are women and men from every nation, tribe, people and language. And so it would appear at the First Baptist Church of Flushing (FBC). FBC is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-generational church located in the heart of one the world's most ethnically diverse communities, Flushing, Queens. At First Baptist Church, potluck dinners resemble international feasts.

FBC is also a multi-congregational church. Our rich diversity compels us to congregate in five different congregations – two Chinese language services (a traditional service in Mandarin and Cantonese and a contemporary service in Cantonese and English), one Spanish language service, one English language service, and one English language youth service that ministers to the English speaking youth from each of our congregations. But even though FBC is divided by language into different congregations, we are still one church, not five churches sharing one facility. There is one budget, one board of deacons, one board of trustees, one missions committee, one children's ministry, and one pastoral staff serving the needs of the whole church. Those who join the membership at FBC do not become members of a particular congregation; they become members of First Baptist Church and are free to worship and participate in any congregation or fellowship they choose. Very often people will worship in our other services whether or not they speak the language. Our Sunday services are arranged as follows:

- 9:00 AM Spanish Service
- 9:30 AM Contemporary Chinese Service
- 11:00 AM Traditional Chinese Service
- 11:00 AM English Service

² Revelation 7:9.

- 11:00 AM Youth Service
- 11:00 AM Children's Church
- Lord's Supper is celebrated the first Sunday of every month
- Every Sunday from 1:00 – 3:00 PM there is a Chinese school
- Every Sunday from 1:00 – 3:00 PM the Chinese congregation gathers together for lunch
- Every Sunday from 1:00 – 3:00 PM a different fellowship group from the English congregation meets - a Men's Fellowship, Women's Fellowship, Mom's Group, and Filipino Fellowship.

In the English congregation, our worship service is a blend of contemporary and traditional worship. We blend hymns with contemporary choruses, and these are accompanied by our band, choir, and worship teams. Our other congregations are arranged in a similar way. The youth congregation is the most contemporary of all of our services. At 9:30, our people are invited to study God's Word in a variety of Sunday School classes taught by pastors, deacons, and gifted teachers (male and female) from the body of Christ. As the pastor, I teach the adult membership and baptism class. Our other classes include several discipleship classes,³ a general class that studies the Old Testament, and two modular classes. The adult Sunday School is only sparsely attended.

Each congregation, including the youth congregation, is shepherded by its own pastor. The children's ministry is shepherded by a full-time, seminary trained, minister who oversees a volunteer team of more than 150 workers. A Senior Pastor leads this team of pastors and ministers and does not have responsibility for any one congregation. Since we are one church, the pastors work together for the common good of the whole church. Though the pastors devote most of their time to their own individual congregations, there is a sense in which we are each other's associate pastors. We pray together, share resources, and share pulpits. For this reason, the most important meeting each week is the

³ We use the Colossians 2:7 series published by the Navigators.

Wednesday morning Staff meeting where the pastors, administrators, and ministers meet together for three hours for prayer, biblical encouragement, sharing of concerns, vision casting, and discussion of the church's ministries.

At FBC, we strive for unity amid our diversity. This is a theological conviction at FBC. Because the ground is level at the foot of the cross, we believe that Christians are all one in Christ.⁴ Each congregation is equal to all the others regardless of its size or ethnicity. No one group or congregation within the broader body of Christ receives special treatment or special favor. Therefore, we embrace and welcome into membership people of every social strata and every ethnicity into the church. Our former senior pastor used to say, "We don't go to the wall for everything, but we will go to the wall for unity."⁵

Our History

The seeds of this approach to ministry can be found in the earliest days of our history. First Baptist Church was founded by Howard Osgood in 1857. During the first two decades of the church's history, a commitment to immigrants emerged. For example, when many Irish potato farmers immigrated to New York after the 1845 famine, First Baptist Church helped to care for many of those people. Up until 1940, however, the church remained predominantly Caucasian. In 1945, a black family from Barbados started attending the church. One of the daughters from this family remains an active member of our church, our pastoral staff, and the Bethel Seminary of the East even at 80+

⁴ Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11.

⁵ Rev. Russell Rosser served as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Flushing from 1978 until 1999. He frequently used this saying in leadership gatherings.

years of age! From Barbados, this family was of mixed ancestry (Black, English, East Indian, and Scottish).

During the 1950's, the church began to attract people from different countries, especially people associated with the United Nations. In 1954, the church enlarged its facility by adding an education wing to the church. During the 1960's, the next pastor began to emphasize home missions over foreign missions when he saw God drawing the people of the world to New York. This caused a deep struggle within the church which had been primarily homogenous at the time. In 1964, the church split, seemingly over the missions issue, but there may have been other factors.⁶

Flushing underwent tremendous changes after the World's Fair in 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965. Thousands of immigrants poured in to New York City and into Flushing in particular. Emigration in the latter half of the 20th century had shifted away from Southern and Eastern Europe to countries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷

When Reverend Russell Rosser became the pastor of First Baptist Church in 1978, the congregation numbered around 142 people. The core group at that time included Caucasian, West Indian, African American, Filipino, Hispanic, Armenian, Jewish, and second generation Chinese. Reverend Rosser made the decision that the church would become intentionally multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-congregational. Within two years, the church added a young adults' pastor, a pastor to work with Jewish outreach, and a pastor to start a Spanish congregation. At the same time, the Chinese

⁶ McKenzie Pier, "*First Baptist Church of Flushing: A Portrait of Heaven*" (paper, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 1998), 4.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

congregation of 40 that had been using the facility agreed to officially join the church. A pastor was called to lead them. By 1980, the church had three congregations functioning as one church with integrated assets and leadership teams – English speaking, Chinese speaking, and Spanish speaking. The three pastors stayed together for the next 15 years.⁸

The English speaking congregation, which was the focus for this project, is the largest and most diverse of our congregations, with an average attendance of 320-350 worshippers each Sunday. Many affectionately refer to this as the international congregation because nearly two-thirds of its people are foreign born and for 60% of the people, English is not their first language. Their places of origin include Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Korea, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brazil, Haiti, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Trinidad/Tobago, Jamaica, Cuba, Belize, Dominican Republic, Barbados, Guyana, Columbia, St. Lucia, Venezuela, Ireland, Iran, Canada, Italy, Poland, Germany, England, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Russia. As a white, Italian-German-American, I am a minority at FBC.

Our Vision

The vision of First Baptist Church is to be a multi-cultural, multi-lingual church that contextualizes the Word of God to the World of God. Our commitment and vision is the proclamation of the Gospel of Hope in Christ Jesus in order for the transformed to become holistic change agents in the communities around our church that speak one hundred languages. These communities are the local mission field of our church. Our vision embraces the development of missional leadership through task forces that will

⁸ Ibid.

touch the community and world at every level of spiritual, social, emotional and physical need.⁹

Our Core Values

In 2002, the leadership of FBC crystallized the vision of the church by adopting six core values to shape and guide our ministry. These core values reflect the commitments of First Baptist Church of Flushing. They are:

- the proclamation of God's Word;
- missions locally and globally;
- strengthening the family (including those who are single and single-again);
- mobilizing every member for ministry (this reflects our historic commitment to the priesthood of the believer);
- encouraging intimacy with God through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, and
- encouraging unity while respecting diversity.

Periodically, we will preach through these core values and frequently we will allude to them in sermons. These core values are also intended to help us in our decision-making process when starting new ministries.

In the twenty-two years I have been a member of First Baptist Church, the church has been staunchly committed to preaching, teaching, and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Since our inception in 1857, preaching, teaching and missions have formed the centerpiece of FBC. In addition to supporting 38 local and foreign missionaries and missions organizations, each year FBC sends teams to Asia and Latin America for short-term missions and has been a training center for vocational missionaries. FBC is also committed to theological education as a means of equipping women and men from our church for the ministry. In 2004, FBC became the NYC

⁹ First Baptist Church of Flushing, "The Vision of First Baptist Church of Flushing," <http://www.fbcflushing.org/docs/who.html> (accessed 10 January 2009).

campus for Bethel Seminary of the East, a seminary which trains women and men from the tri-state area for ministry. Our Spanish, Chinese, English, and Youth pastors each studied or are currently studying at Bethel Seminary of the East.

Our Community Involvement

Socially, we are committed to serving the immigrant community in Flushing through numerous social services including an English as a Second Language (ESL) program, an after-school homework help program, a Summer Day Camp, a crisis pregnancy center, and a counseling center that ministers to the emotional, psychological, relational and spiritual needs of the congregation and the wider community. We also reach out through the Min Dow Chinese School, a yearly Health Fair, the Angel Tree Project which ministers to the families of those incarcerated, and a Friday night youth group and children's program called Pioneer Clubs, both of which attract children and teenagers from the community. In addition, several times each year, we offer aid and hospitality to the victims of spiritual, natural and political disasters.

Our Ministries

First Baptist Church has a very active ministry, most of which is handled by the laity. One passage that informs our approach to ministry is Ephesians 4:11-16, where the Apostle Paul writes,

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every

supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.¹⁰

We believe the church is healthiest when the leaders cast the vision and devote themselves to the ministry of prayer and the word while the congregation devotes itself to doing the ministry. I teach this philosophy of ministry on the first day of every membership class when I give the class an overview of our church mission and vision. This fits well with our Baptist heritage. As Baptists, we have a historical commitment to the priesthood of the believer. We want the laity to understand that they are the ministers of First Baptist Church. This core value is posted in three languages in the main lobby of the church, is frequently mentioned in sermons, and is reinforced in the membership class. Many have caught this vision, though not nearly enough.

In the English congregation alone, we offer numerous lay-led ministries of care and service to one another in the body including: a Mom's Group, a Women's Fellowship, a Men's Fellowship, a Singles Group called End of Seven for singles aged 25-45, Married Couples Groups, a Caregivers Group, various ethnic fellowships, and Adult Sunday School Classes. Our Tuesday night prayer meeting is led by a divorced man who has a burden to lead others in prayer. He is recognized by many in the congregation as a man of prayer. There is also a PAIRS Group for Married Couples that meets bi-monthly and is led by two married couples in our church who went through special training to lead this communication-oriented ministry to married couples. Within the past few years, some of our members initiated compassion ministries to the poor and marginalized in our city. In November 2007, for example, one of our members, a NYC school teacher, invited the director of Network 9:35 of the Evangelicals for Social

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:11-16 NIV.

Action/Sider Center for Ministry and Public Policy to preach and then lead a seminar at FBC on how we can become more involved in holistic ministries in our community.

Afterwards, he led our Men's Fellowship through a study of the book *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions (New Studies in Biblical Theology)* by Craig L. Blomberg. Afterwards, he created an adult Sunday School class to study the same book. He now meets monthly with a small group of women and men from the church for training and outreach to the poor and needy in our church and in our city.

Another young lady began a compassion ministry to Manhattan's homeless. For almost a year, she and another lady brought sandwiches and blankets to the homeless.

To facilitate the worship on a Sunday morning, there is a hospitality team, a tech support team, ushers, worship teams, a choir, and a band. We also have a Visitor's Center that greets and assimilates visitors. This ministry is under the capable leadership of a taxi driver from our congregation who is gifted in both worship and evangelism. Each pastor also has a group of Coworkers, appointed by each pastor and affirmed by the congregation that meets monthly and is responsible for the planning and implementation of the ministry.

About the City of Flushing

Flushing, founded in 1645, is a neighborhood in the north central part of the borough of Queens, ten miles east of Manhattan.¹¹ The city of Flushing is a culturally diverse, over-crowded, rapidly developing, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual city characterized by religious diversity, six to twenty-five story apartment buildings, and limited parking.

¹¹ Flushing, Queens, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flushing,_New_York (accessed 12 January 2009).

On November 2, 2005, a data specialist named Susan Douglas of Lifeway Church Resources prepared a demographic summary of Flushing. She drew three rings around our church and studied the demographics within those rings. She looked at the demography within a 3-mile ring, a 5-mile ring, and a 10-mile ring. Since slightly more than 50% of the English congregation lives within the 3-mile radius, and most live within the 10-mile ring, her data was helpful in seeing whether or not our congregation is a reflection of the community. According to her results, within the 3-mile ring, the median age is 38; the average household income is \$67,007; and racially, it is 54% White, 10% Black, 30% Asian, 5% multi-racial, and 31% of Hispanic origin.¹² The results are very similar in the 5-mile and 10-mile rings. Overall, the English congregation of First Baptist Church is a reflection of the surrounding community. We are an international congregation existing within one of the most international boroughs in the world.

If you don't mind the crowds, Flushing is an exciting place to work and live. The community is filled with a wide array of ethnic eateries. Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Middle Eastern, and other Asian-style restaurants and bakeries can be found everywhere. When you walk through the downtown area, you will seldom hear English spoken in shops or on cell phones. There are mini-malls, street vendors, and services of all kinds, including a first-rate city college, Queens College, two large hospitals, a newly renovated main branch of the Queens Public Library, and a host of small businesses, most of which cater to the growing Asian population. For example, the banks in the downtown area include the Korean Bank, the Amerasian Bank, the Bank of

¹² Susan Douglas, "*Site Express Report for First Baptist Church Flushing*" (census data, Lifeway Church Resources, November 2005).

East Asia, and Chinatrust. Flushing is also home to Flushing Meadow Park, the USTA, Citifield, and the Queens Botanical Gardens,

Flushing is a wonderful mixture of cultures. Over 100 different ethnicities can be found in Flushing. If you value ethnic and cultural diversity, Flushing is a wonderful place to raise children. The Asian population is the most rapidly growing community in Flushing. Most new businesses have signage in English and at least one Asian language.

But still the most striking aspect about Flushing is its religious diversity. Within a ten block radius of First Baptist Church, there are churches of many different denominations, Buddhist temples, mosques, and synagogues. St. George's Episcopal/Anglican church is a landmark church that has served the people of Flushing for more than 300 years. St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, one block from our church, was founded in 1833. Our church was founded in 1857. The Bowne House, constructed in 1661, was used as a meeting place for Quakers. There are numerous Korean, Chinese and Taiwanese churches in Flushing. Many of the Asian churches offer services in English to the second generation.

In addition to churches, our community is home to two mosques, a brand new Hindu center, the Hindu Temple Society of North America, the Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Temple, two Buddhist Temples, the Kissena Jewish Center, and the Free Synagogue of Flushing, founded in 1917. The world has come to Flushing giving the church a wonderful opportunity to reach the world without ever leaving our zip code.

About the Problem at FBC

For as long as I have been a member of FBC, our tendency has been to be a mile wide but an inch deep. Because the church is engaged in numerous ministries to the church, the community, and the world, our tendency has been to bite off more than we can chew and to keep the saints of God busy with activity. The problem at FBC was related to the core value of promoting intimacy with God through the practice of the spiritual disciplines. In comparison to our activity-oriented core values, relatively little attention was paid to the promotion of the spiritual disciplines as a means of personal spiritual growth and transformation. I am not the only one who sensed this imbalance. Others from the church were convinced that more emphasis needed to be placed on this core value. In a survey of 50 members from the English congregation in the summer of 2007, 88% said that there needs to be a greater focus on this dimension of our church (see Appendix 1). The survey also supported my site team's conviction that the devotional life of many of our parishioners amounted to inconsistent and infrequent times of prayer and simple bible reading. The survey showed that there was a general neglect of the more contemplative disciplines (silence, solitude, meditative/centering prayer, journaling, personal retreats). At FBC, the unspoken assumption was that spiritual growth would happen as people read their bible, attend worship services, and participate in fellowship groups, service-orientated ministries, and special events. While growth does occur through such means, it is an incomplete and insufficient approach to personal spiritual growth and transformation.

Though we valued spiritual formation enough to consider it a core value, we were not helping our parishioners to understand the true value of the spiritual disciplines nor

were we helping them to practice the less familiar disciplines of contemplative prayer, meditation, personal retreats, silence, solitude, and spiritual journaling. When lay leaders completed their term of service on either the board of deacons or the board of trustees, they were not offered spiritual guidance or direction to maximize their sabbatical leave. In the English congregation, we emphasized “doing” rather than “being.” We did comparatively little to encourage and equip people to take regular times of spiritual rest, refreshment and devotion so that their lives and ministries flowed out of their intimacy with Christ. One place this deficiency could be seen was at our monthly deacons’ meeting. The meetings began with the sharing of prayer requests (most of the deacons did not share), followed by a few minutes of prayer before launching into the business at hand. After 2-3 hours of discussion, one of the deacons closed the meeting in prayer.

I personally experienced the ill-effects of this model of ministry in 2003. Feeling spiritually and emotionally depleted, I considered leaving the ministry. At a friend’s suggestion, I requested and was granted a six-month sabbatical leave to focus on the areas of soul care, spiritual refreshment, and self-leadership. For the first time in my 17 years of ministry, I took day-long spiritual retreats, daily prayer walks, and practiced silence, centering prayer, journaling, weekly fasting, and meditation. I created a sabbatical plan which I shared with the leadership. The plan was divided into three parts: spiritual formation, personal formation, and ministry formation. To this day, parishioners still comment on the changes they have seen in my life and ministry as a result of the sabbatical. What I experienced during my six month sabbatical, I wanted to impart to the congregation. I wanted to help our lay leaders and members to experience the presence of God in the course of their daily life so that their ministry would be the overflow of their

time spent with Christ. I wanted to help the members of the English congregation to understand and practice the spiritual disciplines, particularly, contemplative forms of prayer, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and personal retreats so that they would live more spiritually-centered lives.

So I set before my site team the following challenge statement: First Baptist Church of Flushing, Queens is a multi-cultural, multi-congregational, ministry-oriented church with a strong and vital emphasis on missions. What is lacking in our setting is spiritual centeredness and a means of promoting spiritual centeredness. This project will implement a model of personal spiritual formation that will invite parishioners to live more spiritually centered lives.

The focus of this project was to create and implement a model that would foster and enable personal spiritual formation amidst the demands of urban life so that the people of God could achieve greater spiritual balance than they were currently experiencing and take steps toward achieving more of a rhythm between doing and being. As a result of this project, and by the grace of our great God, we took significant strides towards this goal.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

The DNA of FBC

Every church has its own DNA or ethos. An integral part of the DNA of the First Baptist Church of Flushing is activity. Our vital emphasis on local and global missions, our readiness to encourage lay-led ministry initiatives, our multi-tiered leadership structure which requires some leaders to attend two and three different leadership meetings every month, and our commitment to sustaining a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-congregational ministry, keeps our church buzzing with activity and our leaders very busy. The pastors, for example, have to attend three and sometimes four different leadership meetings every month where the agenda is virtually the same in an effort to foster and maintain clear communication among the different leaders of the church. Without clear communication, our multi-cultural, multi-congregational model of ministry would be unsustainable. In the decades of the 1980's and 1990's, 80-hour work weeks were commonplace among the pastoral staff at that time. Thankfully, the current pastoral leadership team does not subscribe to such a work ethic. The most trying time of year at First Baptist Church is Advent when the combination of programs, outreaches, and celebrations becomes exhausting. In an effort to simplify a season that calls forth reflection and remembrance and worship, the leadership decided to cancel its December Deacon's meeting in 2008. The month was still exhausting.

Many wonder what could be wrong with a church like ours. After all, has not God called upon the church to do works of service for the glory of God? Has not God given spiritual gifts to the church for the building up of itself in love? Indeed God has! One of the complaints often heard in churches today is that 80% of the work is done by only 20% of the people. There is a sense in which that is true at First Baptist Church as well. While we do have a vital and strong emphasis on missions and ministry at FBC, often that ministry is in the hands of the few, not the many. So like many churches, we find ourselves calling for volunteers to serve within the many different ministries operating at our church and to initiate new ministries to reach out to neglected portions of our community. The problem with our ethos, however, is that it is not balanced with an equal emphasis on spiritual formation, spiritual centeredness, and developing an intimacy with God. Our ethos, then, leads to the manifestation of fatigue and frustration in the lives of some of our leaders (clergy and lay) and it presents an imbalanced view of the Christian life to everyone. People are led to believe that ministry, service, and missions are the true essence of Christianity. To be a Christian is to be a minister of the gospel. And of course, that is partially correct. Where would the church be if it were not for the service rendered by the women and men of God who comprise the body of Christ? How much would be accomplished in the world for the cause of Christ if we all just sat on our laurels? But God did not send the Son of God into the world just to make us servants of God who do his bidding. God sent his Son into the world that we might be reconciled to God, that we might become children of God, and that we might enjoy intimacy with God, an intimacy that was lost in the Fall and reestablished through Christ. We sometimes forget that the most pleasurable aspect of life in the Garden for Adam and Eve was the late afternoon

when God visited Adam and Eve and walked with them in the cool of the Garden. Our emphasis on service and participation in various programs often has the effect of filling people's schedules with so many activities on top of their already full lives that communion with God is easily sacrificed on the altar of busyness.

The Impact of our DNA on Leadership

The impact of our structure on the lives of some of our leaders is readily apparent. One of our struggles at FBC concerns poor and inconsistent attendance at many of our leadership meetings. This is a problem I have observed for the 19 years I have been on the pastoral staff. Seldom do all of the trustees or all of the deacons or all of the coworkers attend all of their monthly meetings. This does not necessarily indicate a spiritual problem. Sometimes a leader's job is such that he or she is required to work when a meeting is held. Sometimes a leader is just physically tired from the routines of life. Those who work multiple jobs or extra hours to make ends meet and have a family at home are particularly vulnerable to exhaustion. And sometimes a leader misses meetings because his or her plate is overflowing with ministry responsibilities from wearing too many ministry hats. But still there are others who are just as busy and just as tired, but still make every meeting and fulfill every responsibility at home, church, and work.

What is the difference among all of these leaders? There are many differences to be sure. Some people have a higher sense of duty or commitment than others and would not think to fail at a responsibility. For others, it is a matter of saving face. In certain cultures, failing at one's responsibility is a shameful thing. But perhaps one difference is the spiritual life of the leader. Leaders who have learned how to practice the presence of

God seem better able to live balanced lives and are better equipped to fulfill all of their responsibilities in a manner that honors God.

Another impact of our structure can be seen in attendance at prayer meetings. Not only do some leaders struggle to attend their leadership meetings consistently, many do not attend a prayer meeting. Again, many reasons can be cited. For some, the timing of the meeting conflicts with their schedule. Others do spend time in corporate prayer with their families or small group. But one reason often cited by those who do not attend the weekly prayer meeting is fatigue and busyness. In addition to their jobs and the time spent commuting back and forth to work, many folks spend a good portion of their Sunday as well as their Friday nights in the church building, participating in church activities, or they spend time after work preparing for their ministry. It is difficult to be out one more evening for a prayer meeting. What seems to be a pattern in many churches is definitely a pattern at FBC – when people’s schedules are full, one of the first activities to be crowded out is corporate prayer. Based on surveys and conversations with numerous individuals, that is also true at the individual level as well. Activity tends to crowd out contemplation.

Another impact of our structure and present imbalance between being and doing is spiritual fatigue. Again, there are many factors that contribute to spiritual fatigue among professional ministers and voluntary leaders in a church. In my nineteen years of pastoral ministry, I have observed the following factors at work in those who have chosen or been forced to step away from their ministry assignments or who have served with the wrong spirit¹³:

¹³ By wrong spirit, I am referring to those who serve with a critical, judgmental, or joyless spirit.

- Over commitment
- Isolation (lack of encouragement from others)
- Unrealistic expectations (there is often a disparity between one's idealistic expectations for changing people's lives and the hard reality that people resist change)
- Feelings of failure and inadequacy
- Criticism
- Not living with boundaries (not being able to say 'no' to additional responsibilities)

In addition to these factors, my site team and I believe that a major part of the problem is a lack of spiritual centeredness among our ministers.¹⁴ If people keep putting out without refueling their spiritual tanks at the feet of Jesus, eventually they will run out of gas.

Promoting and prioritizing spiritual centeredness and balance is not part of the DNA of our church. Board meetings do not function as spiritual communities. We incorporate what Charles Olsen refers to as “book-end” prayers but the meetings are primarily agenda-driven.¹⁵ When serious issues arise at a meeting, such as conflicts among board members, a ministry initiative, a serious personal concern, we seldom stop what we are doing to pause for a time of prayer. And when facing something potentially destructive to the life of the church, we have never thought to apply what George McClain calls cleansing prayer.¹⁶ In 2006, a possible merger between our church and a local Christian school, which many believed would be a significant blessing to our church, the school, and the community, was shot down after an impasse was reached over the issue of control. Rather than pausing to pray for God's leading, and then waiting upon

¹⁴ I am using the term ‘minister’ to refer to those volunteers who serve in various capacities in our local church.

¹⁵ Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (An Alban Institute Publication, 1995), xiii.

¹⁶ George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God: Prayer, Discernment, and Ritual for Social Change* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998), 104-115.

a response, the project was cancelled. Was it God's will to cancel the project or was it the result of not being patient in prayer? Only God knows. We probably should have prayed in unison before making a decision that affected so many groups of people.

In 2006, we adorned the main wall of our church lobby with photographs and plaques showing our mission statement, our vision statement, and our six core values. Though the pursuit of spiritual centeredness through the practice of the spiritual disciplines is listed as one of our core values, the pictures on the wall reveal that we are a missions driven church. The pictures are of the church at work. The core value of living spiritually centered lives is seldom taught and modeled with consistency to the congregation. This is not the case with our other core values. Because we value missions, for example, our pastors participate in a short-term missions trips each summer, the Sr. Pastor is allotted several weeks each year to do missions work in Asia, and missionaries regularly share testimonies on Sunday morning, not just at our annual Missions Conference. Because we value Christ-centered families, we offer married couples' small groups, retreats, and seminars. One of our married couples was even trained in a specialized married couples' ministry called PAIRS to provide more intensive pastoral care to married couples. Each of these ministries is an integral and precious aspect of the ministry at FBC. The problem is one of balance. In comparison to our other core values, precious little is built into our ministry to equip and encourage our ministry-minded parishioners to let their ministry flow out of their intimacy with God.

This lack of emphasis on spiritual centeredness can even be seen at some of our retreats. Each year, our congregation sponsors between three and seven different retreats. While some of these weekend retreats allow for significant times of prayer and personal

reflection, frequently relatively little time is set aside for people to experience the presence of God compared to the amount of time that is allotted for group activities. I have personally observed this at some of our Men's retreats. Although time is set aside each morning for the men to spend an hour alone with God, some of the men spend this time talking with each other, playing ball, or walking the grounds, uncertain of how to spend an hour with God. I would even argue that our concept of a retreat is too limited. At FBC, we do not sponsor spiritual retreats, or retreats of silence, where people are invited to go away on retreat simply to spend extended time in the presence of God, although certain individuals do this on their own.

One cause for this imbalance can be found in our tradition. Historically, Conservative Baptists have been committed to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Contemplative spirituality has not been a vital part of our tradition, though I can see a trend beginning to emerge in some of our churches. For example, the vision statement for a Conservative Baptist church in Colorado reads, "To see lives transformed as we influence our world out of our intimacy with God."¹⁷ But more often than not, talk of contemplative spirituality creates feelings of discomfort among some Conservative Baptists. For example, when a new family visited our church in 2006, they told me that they left their previous church when the pastor returned from his sabbatical and introduced contemplative spirituality into the life of the church. They said he was becoming too Catholic. This fortress mentality, this bias that some have towards anything that is mystical or unfamiliar to our Baptist tradition, is an obstacle many pastors need to overcome when trying to introduce contemplative spirituality into the church. I was

¹⁷Pulpit Rock Church, "Our Vision and Mission," <http://www.pulpitrock.com/about/vismis.html> (accessed 1 November 2007).

pleasantly surprised, however, that as I introduced different elements of contemplative spirituality into our congregation that no one approached me with negative feedback and no one accused me of being too Catholic.

The Urgency of the Problem

This lack of emphasis on personal spiritual centeredness at FBC is an urgent problem. Even a cursory glance at the life of Jesus in the Gospels reveals that he frequently retreated to a quiet place to be alone with his heavenly Father. His ministry was born out of prayer and communion with God. In communion with God, Jesus was able to discern God's yearning and find strength for the carrying out of his mission. In Gethsemane, while facing the enormous challenge of going to the cross where he would not only experience the excruciating pain of crucifixion but would also stand before the abyss of God's wrath as the sin-bearer, Jesus found strength through prayer. We learn from Jesus' example that to be effective agents of transformation in the world we must prioritize those time-tested means of discerning God's yearning: personal prayer, meditation, Bible reading, journaling, and so forth?¹⁸ One can apply the "how much more" argument. If the sinless Son of God spent extensive time in personal communion with God, how much more should fallen creatures like us do the same if we are to discern God's yearning and find strength to do the will of God? If the life of Jesus is exemplary for all servants of God, I do not see how a minister can endure the rigors of ministry when his or her soul is regularly neglected. In 2004, Mindy Caliguire of Willow Creek Community Church asked a group of ministry leaders the question: "What symptoms

¹⁸ McClain, 76.

tend to emerge in the life of a person who neglects his or her soul?” They gave the following list of “symptoms”:

- self-absorption
- shame
- apathy
- toxic anger
- chronic fatigue
- lack of confidence
- isolation
- sin looks more appealing
- no compassion
- self-oriented
- drivenness
- loss of vision
- no desire for God.¹⁹

At stake for the First Baptist Church in regards to this challenge is the spiritual health of our church and the overall effectiveness of our members and especially our leaders. This problem is acute at FBC because we are not a simple church.

The goal of this project was not to change the structure of First Baptist Church nor was it to add another ministry to our extensive list of ministries. If we had created spiritual formation groups or seminars, for example, we would have created an additional event for people to add to their already busy lives. Our goal was to affect the DNA of our church by helping our congregation to recognize and value the necessity of living spiritually centered lives so that they would make room in their lives for the presence of God. We wanted our congregation to value the practice of spiritual centeredness just as it values our other core values.

¹⁹ Mindy Caliguire, “Soul Health: You Can’t Be Fruitful If You Neglect The Source.” Leadership, (Summer 2004), in Soul Care, <http://www.soulcare.com/SoulHealthArticle.html> (accessed 28 September 2007).

This proved to be a great challenge. Creating the spiritual formation handbook and then recruiting a pilot group to work through the handbook took time and effort, but they were not where the challenge lay. As one member of the pilot group said to me at the end of our project, “People are happy to rally around whatever you are passionate about.” Our greatest challenge was getting people to rearrange their priorities and practices. Change is difficult for everyone, and it is particularly difficult to effect change in well-established churches. For example, one element we tried to incorporate into our Sunday morning worship experience was a ten-minute pre-service whereby people were invited to prepare themselves spiritually for the worship of God. Each Sunday for nine months, we prepared power point slides with bible verses or quotes from one of the spiritual classics that people could read and prayerfully respond to as a way of centering themselves before the service so that they did not enter the worship service in a harried and hurried and distracted manner. Even though we introduced the pre-service on several occasions, dimmed the lights, and closed the doors that separate the sanctuary from our fellowship hall, it was very difficult to get people into a rhythm of being silent and reflective for those ten minutes. If an introductory comment was made, the people tended to practice the disciplines of silence and meditation. But the very next week, they were as noisy as ever, even as the verses were projected and a worship CD played in the background. What was particularly frustrating to me were the times when I was sitting in a pew with my head bowed in prayer and individuals would come over to shake my hand and say hello. But those who participated regularly in the pre-service shared how much they enjoyed it and encouraged me not to grow weary of doing this. Our church has been in existence for 150 years. It’s unlikely that we will change its ethos in nine months.

Another example we noted of the difficulty people have of changing their habits was in the use of the spiritual formation handbook. At the start of each daily office, people were encouraged to spend several minutes in silence before the Lord. They could use those moments to reflect upon a phrase of scripture, repeat a short prayer, or they could just sit in silence until the noise rattling around inside of them calmed down. At the final gathering of the pilot group, many people said this was one of the most difficult aspects of the handbook to practice. For most people, silence was a new discipline. But for those who practiced the discipline of silence, as well as those who centered themselves before our Sunday services, the experiences were beneficial.

Overall, significant strides have been made to create an environment that encourages spiritual centeredness and that values the practice of personal spiritual formation at the First Baptist Church of Flushing. My site team and I believe that the stage has been set to lead our congregation further in this direction and we are committed to building upon the foundation that was laid during the course of this project.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

When I began this project, my first goal was to raise awareness among the people of God in the English-speaking congregation of the First Baptist Church of Flushing to the importance of living spiritually-centered lives, that is, lives that demonstrate a healthy balance between “being” and “doing.” As a church, we tend to lean more towards the spirituality of service to the neglect of quiet time in the presence of God where we can practice spiritual disciplines such as silence, solitude, meditation, and meditative prayer. The primary method I used to raise this awareness was a series of six consecutive sermons at the very start of my project. In these sermons, I identified the means of grace (i.e., spiritual disciplines) found in scripture and then presented several examples of the women and men of faith throughout church history who practiced these disciplines, including Jesus Christ. This is striking! Although his mission was relatively brief and of eternal significance, Jesus consistently set aside time to “be” in the presence of God. Even though Jesus had things to do, places to go, and people to see, he would often pull away from the crowds to honor the ancient rhythm between work and rest, a rhythm which God established at creation and honored by working for six days and then resting on the seventh day. We can learn a great deal about the process of spiritual formation in our own lives by examining the spiritual practices and habits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, not everyone believes it is valuable to consider the example of Jesus Christ. There is a sense among some Christians that Jesus Christ was automatically a spiritual person by virtue of that fact that he is the second person of the Trinity.²⁰ This perspective, however, reflects a deficiency in one's own understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Although Christians confess that Jesus Christ is the fullness of deity in bodily form (Col. 2:9), we also confess that he came to earth robed with our humanity, and lived among us as a human being (Phil 2:5-8). The gospels teach us that Jesus grew as other human beings grow: "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). We can assume, then, that Jesus also grew spiritually.²¹ Therefore, Jesus presents to us a paradigm of a life lived perfectly under the guidance of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Because he lived as a perfect human being, there is no better example for Christians than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament agree. They exhort the redeemed people of God to emulate Jesus Christ. The apostle John put it this way: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (I John 2:6 NIV). The apostle Paul was even more emphatic about emulating Christ: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1 NASB). Dr. Bruce Demarest comments on the impact of Paul's statement when he says, "Paul's word for "imitator" literally means one who "mimics." To follow Christ is to mimic Him."²² Peter also writes: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps" (I Pet. 2:21 NIV). Demarest notes, "As Christians we

²⁰ Scot McKnight, "Jesus' Guide to Spiritual Formation: Interview with Scot McKnight," interview by Joseph B. Modica, in *Christianity Today* 49, no. 4 (April 2005): 105.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dr. Bruce Demarest, *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Nav Press, 2003), 16.

trust Christ's merits for salvation, and so also we imitate his example in ministry.²³

Consider Jesus' last words to Peter before ascending to heaven, words which certainly apply to all Christians: "You must follow my example" (John 21:22 NIV). Jesus Christ is our exemplar. Therefore, our task in the Christian life is to strive with all our might and in the power of the Holy Spirit to imitate the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although we will fall short of his example because of our humanness, still our goal, our passion, and our desire should be the imitation of Christ who is the supreme example for Christians of what it means to love God and to love others.

So what do we see of Jesus when we look at the account of his life as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? We see Jesus in action. Specifically, we find multiple instances of Jesus punctuating his busy schedule with times of solitude and prayer. We find in Jesus a wonderful balance of "being" and "doing." In Luke 5:15-16, for example, Luke writes, "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Jesus was not always able to find times like that for spiritual rest and refreshment, but he found them frequently (*often* as Luke records) because such times were crucial to his carrying out of his mission, as William Barclay says in his insightful commentary on Luke 5:16:

The love in the eyes of God compensated him for the hate in the eyes of men. The approval of God nerved him to meet the criticism of men. He drew strength for the battle of life from the peace of God—and it is enough for the disciples that he should be as his Lord.²⁴

²³ Demarest, 16.

²⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1975), 61.

Barclay appears to be saying that the intensity of Jesus' life and ministry made being in the presence of God a necessity for him. Unfortunately for many Christians today, the busyness and intensity of our lives often has the reverse effect on us. Our response to busyness is more along the lines, "*I'm too busy to pray!*" And yet, the very things that keep us from intimacy with God were the very things that drove Jesus into the arms of God.

Jesus and Solitude

We need to realize that we are not the first people on the planet to have busy lives. In Mark 1:21-34, God has preserved for us what I like to consider an entry from Jesus' PDA. Although every day was not as intense as this day, this passage more or less reflects a typical day in the life of Jesus. Consider this particular day: walk to Capernaum, teach in the synagogue, interact with and heal a demon-possessed man, walk to Simon and Andrew's house for dinner, heal Simon's mother-in-law, and then sit down for a meal with the disciples while answering questions about everything that happened that day. After sunset, all the sick and demon-possessed people of the town are brought to Jesus, who healed many of them and also drove out many demons. Talk about a full day! But before he went to sleep, Jesus did one more thing: he set his alarm. Mark 1:35 (NIV) says, "Very early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." What was Jesus doing? In a disciplined manner, he was practicing the spiritual disciplines of solitude and prayer. He intentionally put aside his to-do list in order to be alone with God. What a marvelous scene! Just the Father and the Son spending time together alone, with no one to teach or

heal. At that moment, Jesus was not out to do anything except to enjoy quiet time in the presence of God. It was in the presence of God that Jesus received refreshment, nourishment, guidance and strength for the work that lied ahead. Jesus was doing what any disciple of Jesus needs to do.

The disciples apparently saw this as a colossal waste of time. Perhaps they concluded from the recent events that Jesus was such a powerful and supernatural being that times of spiritual refreshment were unnecessary.²⁵ Mark tells us that “Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”” (Mark 1:36-37 NIV). There is a tinge of rebuke in those words.²⁶ With the crowds returning the following day to see Jesus, the disciples expect Jesus to be “on call” and ready to meet every need. The implication here is that the disciples think Jesus needs to readjust his priorities. But what the disciples failed to realize was that this was not a waste of time for Jesus. Jesus needed that time alone with God. We see by what follows in the Mark 1 narrative that Jesus appropriated the strength, wisdom, and guidance he needed to fulfill his mission.²⁷ After the disciples interrupt Jesus’ communion with God, Jesus says to them: “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38 NIV). Because Jesus spent time in the presence of God, away from the crowds and the ministry and the busyness of life, he was enabled to carry on with his ministry. This was not an isolated moment for Jesus. Mark will record Jesus doing this again in Mark 6:46 and

²⁵ Donald English, *The Message of Mark, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 60.

²⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 82.

²⁷ Demarest, 180.

again in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42). Prayer and solitude were the lifeblood of Jesus' ministry.²⁸ Jesus regularly sought communion with God, both on ordinary days and on days of special significance, such as his baptism (Luke 3:21), before calling the twelve (Luke 6:12), at his Transfiguration (Luke 9:28), in the Upper Room (John 17), and in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-43).²⁹ The disciple of Jesus should heed this example.

It is important to recognize that each time Jesus went off to pray there were still sick to heal, people to teach, and crowds to serve. Among the excuses Christians make when encouraged to spend time in the presence of God is that there is just too much work to be done. Many of us, pastors included, get caught in this performance trap. We believe that we are too busy to stop, pray and just "be" in the presence of God. Granted, most New Yorkers do lead very active lives. The blistering pace of urban life is enough to fill anyone's calendar. Kirk Byron Jones compiled the following list of tasks that a working parent of young children regularly completes before 9 A.M.: awaken children, exercise, glance at e-mail, receive brief informal and/or work-related phone calls, iron clothing, prepare breakfast, shower/dress, dress children, mediate family disagreements, transport children to bus or school, travel through heavy traffic, and prepare for your first meeting/project of the day.³⁰ I suspect that persons without children feel similar pressures. Pastors and ministers are not exempt. The needs of most urban churches make it difficult for a pastor to punctuate his or her daily schedule with regular periods of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kirk Byron Jones, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2003), 22.

silence, solitude and personal retreat. There are sermons to prepare, meetings to attend, agendas to create, email to return, members to visit, and the sick to comfort. At best, the minister is able to set aside some time in the morning for prayer and devotions. But should these spiritual activities always crowd out of the minister's life other times of spiritual devotion throughout the day? Eugene Peterson believes that pastors become busy for two reasons: because they want to appear significant and because they let others decide how they should fill their days and conduct their lives.³¹ Peterson suggests that a pastor needs to pay more attention to God than to what others are saying to him/her, and for that to happen, the pastor needs to withdraw intentionally from the noise of the day into the presence of God.³²

I agree with Peterson, but as an urban pastor of a full-service church and father of four, I struggle with this as much as anyone. First Baptist Church of Flushing is devoted to preaching, teaching, worship, mentoring, training leaders, sending missionaries, serving the community, and nurturing children, youth, singles and the married, in a multi-cultural, multi-congregational setting. There is always something to do. But as Peterson says, how can we waken others to the centrality of prayer if we do not pray? How can we encourage others to retire to solitary places if we are not leading the way? How can we remain in ministry for the long haul if we are not finding strength from our own personal communion with God? How can we serve others in the same manner as Jesus if our hearts are not beating as one with his? We desperately need to consider the example of Jesus because what he practiced, he also encouraged in others. He often took his disciples

³¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 18.

³² Peterson, 20.

to a quiet, solitary place for rest (Mark 6:31-32). Life is not meant to be lived at such a break-neck pace that it crowds out of our daily existence essentials like family, friendship, worship, rest, and personal devotion. If human beings do not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), this presupposes that we will give ourselves the necessary time to ingest this life-giving word so that it makes its way into our hearts and minds. If we can make time to sit down for three meals each day, certainly we can make time for spiritual food. The example of Jesus is a model for all Christians.

Jesus and Meditation

In addition to solitude and prayer, one of the oft over-looked spiritual disciplines in the life of Jesus is meditation, and by that I mean the slow, deliberate, and thoughtful reading of scripture. Even a casual reading of the Gospels demonstrates that Jesus' life was saturated with scripture. With effortless ease, the scriptures rolled off his tongue. He began his ministry in Luke 4 by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2; at the end of his ministry, while hanging on the cross, in the worst possible pain, his body being ripped open, standing before the abyss of God's wrath, even then his deepest instinct was to quote scripture, Psalm 22. And in between, Jesus faced every joy, every conflict, every danger, and every temptation by quoting scripture. In the wilderness, Jesus extinguished the fiery darts of Satan in the same manner we do, by recalling and quoting the scripture. Did Jesus automatically know the scriptures? No. From a very early age, the scripture was hidden in his heart. In Hebrews 10:7, we find a statement attributed to Jesus that reads, "Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O

God.” Although that is a reference to Psalm 40:7-8, the writer of Hebrews did not record the entirety of Psalm 40:8, which also reads, “Your law is within my heart.” In Psalm 40:7-8, a window is opened into the spiritual life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist tells us that the law of God was in his heart. But how did it get there? Because he was human, Jesus had to learn and internalize the scriptures like other human beings. Just as Jesus had to walk places like other people, eat like other people, and sleep like other people, so Jesus had to learn the scriptures through reading, study and meditation. This is part of the mystery of the Incarnation. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus practiced the ancient discipline of meditation that was taught in places like Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1, and Psalm 119. There can be little doubt that his mother Mary instilled this practice in her son. Mary was a deeply spiritual person who herself had internalized the scriptures. We learn this from the Magnificat where Old Testament scripture flowed from her heart with apparent ease (Luke 1:46-55).³³ Her song reads like a Psalm and is readily compared to Hannah’s song in I Samuel 2. Mary apparently was steeped in the scriptures and I am sure that this godly woman passed this practice on to her son, Jesus. Thus, like the Psalmist, Jesus internalized the Law of the Lord from a very young age by meditating on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). It stands to reason, therefore, that if the Lord Jesus Christ was so saturated with the word of God, how much more should Christians give themselves to the practice of meditation?

One of the sermons I preached to raise awareness among the congregation to the importance of living spiritually-centered lives was a sermon on meditation. My text was Psalm 1. The central claim of Psalm 1 is easy to miss because the opening verse is rather lengthy. The central claim of Psalm 1 is that blessed (happy, fulfilled) is the person who

³³ McKnight: 106.

has learned to enjoy, meditate, or feed upon the Law of the Lord day and night. That person will be “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (Psalm 1:3). The imagery is spectacular! The person who has learned to meditate on scripture is stable, solid, like a tree. She is able to stand firm when the winds of adversity blow against her and the trials of life come. This tree is able to stand in all seasons because it is planted by streams of water where its roots receive a steady supply of life-giving water. Such a tree can survive long, dry seasons. If we tease out this imagery even further, as the water works its way through the roots and up to the branches, the result will be leaves that remain green and fruit, when it appears, that will be plush. Therefore, until we learn to meditate, as the Psalmist did, as Jesus did, not only can we not live spiritually-centered lives, but our lives are likely to be blown apart by the vast array of difficult circumstances that come upon them.

According to surveys we took with the congregation, meditation is a discipline seldom practiced in our church. The reason, I suspect, is that meditation takes time and time is the one thing many of us claim to lack. It is much easier to read a portion of scripture quickly than it is to contemplate a portion of scripture slowly, diligently, carefully, verse by verse, word by word, which is what meditation is.³⁴ Meditation is a way of engaging the sacred text. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola teaches his readers to engage the text of scripture using their five senses.³⁵ This takes time. Thus, when we read a narrative, we are invited to smell the food, touch the cloak of Jesus’ garment, listen to the murmurs in the crowd, etc. But meditation is not only about how

³⁴ Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1, The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 96.

³⁵ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 80.

we handle scripture, it is also about how we pray. Meditation and prayer are joined at the hip. Consider for a moment how the Psalter is compiled. The Psalter, for the most part, is the prayer book of the Bible. Many of the Psalms are prayers. The second Book of the Psalms (Psalms 42 – 72) is even referred to as the prayers of David (Psalm 72:20). But the door to the Psalter is not a prayer nor is it about prayer; rather it is about meditating upon the Law of the Lord. This suggests there is a relationship between the disciplines of meditation and prayer. One possible way to interpret the placement of Psalm 1 as the door to the Psalter is to see meditation as a means to an end, namely deep prayer.³⁶ Keller teaches that in most prayer, we start the conversation with God. We bring to God our needs, our wants, our desires, our concerns, our praises and our confessions. Meditative prayer, on the other hand, is a prayerful response to our meditation on the word of God. Unlike regular prayer, in meditative prayer God starts the conversation. Some refer to this practice as praying the scripture. It is simply an adaptation of the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* which was formalized by the Benedictines in the sixth century.³⁷ In meditative prayer, we engage the sacred text slowly and deliberately, chewing and pondering each word, until prayer is born in us. Meditation is not complete until we respond in prayer to what we have just pondered deeply. Hence, as Guigo II (ca. 1115 – ca. 1198) wrote in *Scala Claustralium*, “prayer without meditation is lukewarm and meditation without prayer is fruitless.”³⁸

³⁶ Timothy Keller, “Meditation,” sermon preached on April 7, 2002, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY.

³⁷ Wendy J. Miller, *Jesus Our Spiritual Director: A Pilgrimage through the Gospels* (Nashville, Tennessee: Upper Room Books, 2004), 41.

³⁸ Jones, 53.

Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

In addition to the multiple instances in the Gospels where Jesus punctuated his active schedule with moments of communion with God, Jesus commends those who followed his example. The best known example of this is the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. The incident occurs while Jesus and his disciples are traveling to Jerusalem for the final time. To get there, they pass through the village of Bethany, a suburb about two miles east of Jerusalem, where a certain householder named Martha extends hospitality to Jesus. Martha had a sister named Mary, “who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.” In this home, Jesus is shown magnificent hospitality by Martha and is listened to avidly by her sister Mary.³⁹ The contrast between Mary and Martha in terms of their relationship to Jesus forms the crux of this passage. Historically, these two women have been taken to represent the active life verses the contemplative life, the present world and the world to come, Judaism and Christianity, justification by faith and justification by works.⁴⁰ Whatever one concludes about these two ladies, it is not difficult to see who gets the low marks and who gets the high marks in the end. According to Jesus, Mary made the good choice (Luke 10:42). That is just the way it is. Whereas Martha wanted Jesus to rebuke Mary for not helping her with all of the preparations, it is Martha, not Mary, who is gently rebuked by Jesus.

But we need to be fair to Martha. Together, Mary and Martha exemplify what it means to be a disciple of Christ.⁴¹ As Kent Hughes so aptly states, “both are women of

³⁹ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 35B, Luke 9:21-18:34*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993), 602.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nolland, 602.

excellence and noble character.”⁴² This is important to understand lest we draw an incorrect conclusion about Martha’s faith and the spirituality of Christian service. There seems to be an unfair tendency among some interpreters to criticize Martha and to exalt Mary as the model disciple. Indeed, Mary was a disciple of Christ. Mary’s posture at the feet of Jesus indicates that the relationship between Mary and Jesus was that of disciple and teacher (see also Luke 8:35).⁴³ This is underscored again in John 12 when Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with very expensive perfume (John 12:3). Martha, however, was no less a disciple than Mary. Martha’s use of the title “Lord” (Luke 10:40) is intended to suggest that Martha too is a disciple of Christ.⁴⁴ Elsewhere we read that Martha both believes in a future resurrection, and gives utterance to one of the great confessions of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Like Peter in Matthew 16:18, Martha says in John 11:27, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” Their confession became the rock upon which the church is built (Matthew 16:18). Martha has a magnificent faith. It is quite likely that Martha’s hospitality to the messenger signaled hospitality to the message itself.⁴⁵ It is significant in our valuation of Martha that in the Gospel of Luke, only Zaccheus and Martha “received” Jesus (Luke 10:38; 19:6).⁴⁶ Martha was a beloved disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke Volume 1: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 395.

⁴³ Christopher Roy Hutson, “Martha’s Choice: A Pastorally Sensitive Reading of Luke 10:38-42,” *Restoration Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2003): 140.

⁴⁴ Holly E. Hearon, “Luke 10:38-42,” *Interpretation* 58, no. 4 (October 2004): 394.

⁴⁵ Nolland, 603.

⁴⁶ Hutson: 141.

Jesus' gentle rebuke of Martha was not a rebuke of her service-oriented faith. Jesus is not faulting Martha for her service. That becomes evident when we examine the literary context of Luke 10. In Luke 10:25, an expert in the law tests Jesus by asking him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The Master-Teacher responds by asking the expert in the law a question of his own, "What is written in the Law?" "He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27 NIV). Following this exchange, Luke inserts two accounts that serve as commentary on the exchange between Jesus and the expert in the Law: the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 illustrates what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, and the incident at the home of Mary and Martha illustrates what it means to love God with our whole being.⁴⁷ Martha is being a good neighbor to Jesus, a practice applauded in the previous story about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Her service is a legitimate spiritual discipline. It is interesting to note that the two accounts do not follow the Law expert's ordering. The expert puts loving God first and loving others second. Interestingly, Jesus begins his response by first telling a story about loving others, perhaps to indicate that loving others is a genuine reflection of true discipleship.⁴⁸ Whereas Mary demonstrated her love by sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen, Martha showed her love to Jesus by receiving him and by serving him. In fact, whenever Martha appears in the gospels, she is serving others and practicing hospitality (John 12:2), marks

⁴⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 450.

⁴⁸ Hutson: 143.

of genuine discipleship (Acts 9:36, Romans 12:13). Therefore, Luke 10:38-42 is not a discussion of the relative merits of active service verses quiet devotion. That is a false dichotomy. As Professor Cynthia Jurisson says, “Inordinate emphasis on practices requiring withdrawal, solitude, and silence can give the mistaken impression that this world is not the realm of the Spirit’s activity and that daily life is not the place where we encounter God. But prayer while doing the dishes, attentive and critical reflection on the sermon, and hymn singing on family car trips are all legitimate spiritual disciplines.”⁴⁹ The incident at the home of Martha and Mary is not intended to exalt the contemplative life over the life of service.⁵⁰ Where would the church be if it were not for the Marthas among us? As a pastor of a full-service church, I am personally thankful that the spirit of Martha is alive and well in Flushing. The ministry of our church depends on their faithful service.

We also need to broaden our understanding of Mary. I believe it would be wrong to assume that Mary acted lazily (contrary to how Martha was feeling) and did nothing to assist Martha with the preparations. Hospitality was a virtue in the first century. Although the sum total of what we are told about Mary is that she sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him (Luke 10:39), we can assume that Mary also acted in a hospitable manner to make Jesus feel welcome. Though unwritten, we can assume that Mary did help Martha with the preparations.

The issue in Luke 10:38-42 concerns balance. Mary had it, Martha did not. In the end, it is Mary, not Martha, who is raised to prominence. As Darrell Bock says in his

⁴⁹ Cynthia Jurisson, “Evangelical Spirituality: Captive To The Word of God,” *Word & World* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 93.

⁵⁰ Marshall, 451.

commentary on this passage, “There is something tranquil in what Mary does. Often in the hustle and bustle of life, we need to pause for a moment of reflection before the Lord.”⁵¹ Such pauses center the disciple of Christ and keep the demands of life in perspective. Martha would have been wise to join Mary in fellowship with Jesus. It may have averted the crisis in verse 40 when her frustration reaches the boiling point and she says to Jesus, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself! Tell her to help me!” Why is Martha so frustrated? Luke tells us that she was “distracted,” a word that suggests ‘being pulled or dragged away, busy, overburdened.’⁵² I. Howard Marshall suggests that Martha wanted to join Mary at the feet of Jesus but was prevented by all of her preparations for a lavish meal.⁵³ Martha’s philosophy seems to have been, “if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well.” Martha was not content to serve a meal; it had to be a feast! Even though her intentions were noble, she allowed herself to lose sight of that which her life truly consisted, a relationship with Jesus. When the pressure got to be too much for Martha, she tells Jesus to order Mary back into the kitchen. How should we take Martha’s request: as a demand? A whine? A cry for help? At the very least, she feels abandoned by Mary and uncared for by Jesus (“Lord, don’t you care?”). It is a very human response. Although there is some question as to the source of Martha’s frustration,⁵⁴ the simplest explanation is that she had bitten off more than she

⁵¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 304.

⁵² Marshall, 452.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Hearon: 395.

could chew and the pressures of her service overwhelmed her.⁵⁵ Jesus pinpoints this as the source of her frustration: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things” (Luke 10:41). Martha lost all perspective. Whereas Mary *sits and listens* to what the Teacher says, Martha *stands and tells* the Teacher what he must say.⁵⁶ Martha fell into the same trap as many modern Evangelicals. She fell to the temptation of serving Jesus at the expense of being fed by Jesus. Martha reminds us that the first thing to go when we get busy with life or busy with ministry is time with the Lord. In the process of serving the Teacher, Martha lost that sense of peace that is the glorious possession of true disciples. Her peace was replaced by anxiety and anger (Luke 10:41).

After diagnosing the cause of Martha’s frustration (excessive preparations for a meal), Jesus offers a better way. There is a textual uncertainty in verse 42. The text either reads “but only one thing is necessary” (NIV) or “but few things are needed – or only one.” Either way, the force of Jesus’ words is clear. Martha is worried about an elaborate meal (“many things”) whereas a simple meal (“few things” or “one thing”) would have been sufficient.⁵⁷ So rather than sending Mary back into the kitchen to help Martha, Jesus urges Martha to simplify her service so that she could join Mary, who had chosen what is better. Jesus thus affirms Mary’s choice as the good choice.

What is the point of this incident? Luke does not include this story in his Gospel to teach us the ABC’s of Christian hospitality. We hear in the echoes of this passage the ongoing struggle of every disciple to balance faithfulness to the never-ending demands of

⁵⁵ Demarest, 92.

⁵⁶ Nolland, 604.

⁵⁷ Hutson: 146.

the ministry and faithfulness to the person of Jesus.⁵⁸ Discipleship is not a matter of choosing one or the other, but of learning to develop a balance between two things: service and reflection.⁵⁹ Martha was so carried away by her ministry that she forgot, for a time, the things of her soul. Not Mary. Mary served. Mary served simply. And then Mary tended to the things of her soul. Martha served. Martha served elaborately. And because she didn't tend to her soul, she grew frustrated and angry. Martha stands as a stark warning to all Christians of the danger of serving faithfully at the expense of caring for one's soul. I have heard it said that it is not the open breach of God's commandments that ought to worry us, but excessive attention to things that are good and lawful and even necessary to the exclusion of caring for our souls. Even the good things of life, such as our families, our ministry, and our interaction with society can become snares to our souls if they draw us away from life-giving fellowship at the feet of Jesus. Mary had chosen what is better, not because service is unimportant, or because contemplation is superior to service, but because ministry to our spirit must precede and coexist with ministry to others or it won't be long before the faithful servant of Christ burns out or becomes a grumbling, whining, and complaining vessel in the service of Christ. Together, Mary and Martha form a composite of true discipleship, a discipleship that holds in tension intimacy with Christ and service to Christ. There are two dimensions to our love of God: a vertical dimension that sits at the feet of Jesus and tends to his word and a horizontal dimension that goes out from the feet of Jesus to interact with society at large. A life that honors God involves both of these dimensions. The Parable of the Good Samaritan with its emphasis on practical ministry keeps us from one-sidedly exalting the

⁵⁸ Hearon: 395.

⁵⁹ Bock, 306.

contemplative side of the Christian life and the emphasis on Mary keeps us from one-sidedly exalting the service side of the Christian life.

After preaching on this text in March 2008, a host of people approached me to say that they were more like Martha though they wished they could be more like Mary. This did not come as a surprise to me. For many Evangelicals, Mary is the model but Martha is the reality. But at the end of the day, Jesus is not asking us to choose between the two, as though we had to choose between living a contemplative life or an active life. When this incident is viewed in the larger context of Luke 10, we conclude that, yes, Mary is the model, but only because sitting at the feet of Jesus means peace, holiness, strength, and zeal for ministry to the one who resides there. Is it better to be Mary or Martha? We would have to side with Jesus and say it is Mary.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Trends among Evangelicals

Talk of spiritual formation has become quite popular in recent years among all kinds of people, including clergy, Christian educators, youth workers, counselors, and large numbers of Christians from many different traditions.⁶⁰ The sheer volume of recent publications and websites devoted to this topic testifies to this trend. An internet search on the keywords “spiritual formation” returns more than 750,000 websites. Of particular interest for this author is that Evangelicals are part of this trend. Even though spiritual formation has been practiced since the earliest days of the church, only recently has it become a major emphasis among Evangelicals.⁶¹ This is more than a casual embrace. Evangelicals have begun to step outside of their Evangelical tradition to explore ancient spiritual disciplines and practices from other traditions as a means to fostering intimacy with God and conformity to the likeness of Christ.⁶² One thing that seems to have piqued this interest in spiritual formation among Evangelicals was the publication of Richard

⁶⁰ Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, “*Spiritual Direction and Christian Soul Care*,” in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*, ed. Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 7.

⁶¹ Dallas Willard, “*Spiritual Formation in Christ Is for the Whole Life and the Whole Person*,” in *For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Timothy George and Alistair McGrath (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 45.

⁶² Demarest, 14.

Foster's 1978 ground breaking book *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. This book was named by *Christianity Today* as one of the top ten books of the twentieth century⁶³ and has become required reading at numerous Evangelical seminaries. Foster, an Evangelical Quaker, remains one of the leading spokespersons and writers on the subject of Christian spirituality.⁶⁴ After the publication of *The Celebration of Discipline*, not only did Foster continue to write books on the subject of spirituality, but so did many other Evangelicals. Dallas Willard, a Southern Baptist minister, has written several books, including *In Search of Guidance*, *The Divine Conspiracy*, and *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. John Ortberg, a teaching pastor at the immensely influential Evangelical church, Willow Creek Community Church, has written *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. In 1989, Eugene Peterson wrote what I consider to be one of the most important books on pastoral leadership, *The Contemplative Pastor*. In it, he calls pastors away from executive models of leadership to things like prayer, poetry, patience, people, and soul care. We see the trend toward spiritual formation everywhere. Some Evangelical seminaries now encourage their students to study spiritual formation. For example, in 2005 and 2006, the Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver published two lengthy bibliographies of recent books on the subjects of Christian spirituality, formation, and direction.⁶⁵ Even the field of spiritual direction is enjoying a renaissance as it were. One of the noteworthy examples of this

⁶³ "Richard J. Foster," at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Foster_\(religion\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Foster_(religion)) (accessed 1 December 2008).

⁶⁴ Bill Samuel, "Richard Foster: Quaker Writer on Christian Spirituality," at <http://www.quakerinfo.com/foster.shtml> (accessed 1 December 2008).

⁶⁵ "Recent Books on Christian Spirituality, Formation, and Direction: A Bibliography – 2005," at <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/recent-books-on-christian-spirituality-formation--direction-a-bibliography-2005/> (accessed 20 November 2008).

trend is Leighton Ford, who after a thirty-three year career of preaching to large audiences with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, left his preaching ministry and began to minister to individuals as a spiritual director.⁶⁶ This rising interest in spiritual formation, spiritual direction, and the spiritual disciplines indicates that something has been missing from our Evangelical tradition, causing many to hunger and thirst for a greater intimacy with the living God.

Although Foster, Willard, and others have inspired contemporary Christians to engage God through the practice of spiritual disciplines, they are merely recovering something that was emphasized from the earliest days of the church. The Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12 NIV). The Apostle Paul encourages Christians to work *out* their salvation. It is important to notice that Paul does not tell us to work *for* our salvation, as though salvation was something that could be earned by human achievement. Instead, he exhorts us to work *out* our salvation. The point here is that you can only work *out* something that is already your possession. Paul is encouraging believers to take the grace that they have already received when they were united to Christ by faith and work it out in every dimension of their being: their relationships, their behavior, their attitudes, their service, their whole life. In other words, Christians are to create space for the grace of God to seep into the nooks and crannies of their existence so that it can transform every sphere of their life into the image, character, and likeness of Jesus Christ. Therefore Christians are active participants in the process of spiritual

⁶⁶ Demarest, 14.

formation and transformation. God's grace is the transforming agent. Our task is to create space in our lives for the grace of God and the love of God to change our habits, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors so that we can return love to the One who first loved us.⁶⁷ How does that happen? The same way it has been happening for centuries, namely, by practicing the personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, also known as the means of grace, that lie at the heart of our Christian faith. The practices of prayer, Bible study, meditative prayer, contemplative prayer, silence, solitude, simplicity, fasting, journaling, confession, and guided spiritual direction are illustrative of these practices. These practices are not ends in and of themselves. Rather, they enable us to love God and serve God in our neighbor, i.e., the whole human family.⁶⁸ These practices do not merit the grace of God, but lead us into God's presence and create space in our lives for the grace of God to shape and transform us. This is the basic meaning of spiritual formation. Evangelical author Dallas Willard writes, "Spiritual formation refers to the *process* of shaping our spirit and giving it a definite character. It means the formation of our spirit in conformity with the Spirit of Christ."⁶⁹ Spiritual formation is a process, not a one time lightning strike, whereby our whole life takes on the very character of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁰ Foster seems to have rekindled an interest among Evangelicals and others in that Biblical practice of spiritual discipline.

⁶⁷ Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2005), 23.

⁶⁸ Thelma Hall, R.C., *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 14.

⁶⁹ Dallas Willard, *Spiritual Formation in Christ Is for the Whole Life and the Whole Person*, 45.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Obstacles to Recovery of the Disciplined Life

But why has it taken so long for the Evangelical community to develop a significant interest in the process of personal spiritual formation as outlined by people like Richard Foster and Dallas Willard? For one thing, historic Protestantism has regarded such practices with suspicion, in part, because of the protest of the Reformation against work-righteousness and against practices not clearly identified in scripture.⁷¹ Because Evangelicalism is a theological movement deeply influenced by the Reformation, devotional practices that are not clearly defined in scripture are often looked upon with suspicion. Adding to this skepticism were certain destructive practices found within the Monastic Movement, a movement which dominated Christian spirituality in the East and the West from 300 – 1000 AD.⁷² These practices included such things as self-imposed body hatred, flagellation, abandonment from the world, and other sufferings. Because the basis for such practices is not expressly stated in Scripture, Evangelicals have tended to regard the devotional life of monks and mystics with suspicion.⁷³ The Reformers had few kind words for monasticism. Even though the disciplined practitioners of asceticism were well-intentioned, being concerned with overcoming temptation and worldliness in their lives, their seeming lack of conformity to scripture became a stumbling block for Word-centered Evangelicals who decry an irrational piety and maintain that it is doctrinal preaching, liturgical worship, and the

⁷¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Crisis of Piety: Essays Towards a Theology of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 64.

⁷² Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 41.

⁷³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 139.

knowledge of God that shape the inward life.⁷⁴ Because spiritual discipline came to be associated with Monasticism, Catholicism, or mysticism, a rift developed between those who revered contemplative spirituality and Protestants who revered a more cognitive way of knowing and experiencing God.⁷⁵

Further distancing Evangelicals from the rich history of spirituality practiced in the non-Evangelical world are the theological pillars we inherited from the Reformation, namely sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo Gloria. Although these pillars form the essence of Protestant life and practice, there was a negative backlash to them. Because the Reformers placed such extreme emphasis upon salvation by grace, justification by faith, and the authority of scripture, they virtually negated monasticism and many of its practices on the grounds that it implied a works-righteousness.⁷⁶ That is not to say that spiritual discipline and devotion were lacking in the lives of these Reformers. Calvin, the most influential of the Reformers, held in balance the twin truths of justification and sanctification. His spirituality had three characteristics – it was mystical, corporate, and social.⁷⁷ But because spiritual formation was not the primary focus at that stage of Protestant history, the Reformers did not emphasize the devotional life, and instead reacted against monasticism and its devotional practices. So as often happens in life, the baby got thrown out with the bath water.

⁷⁴ Ralph C. Wood, “*Outward Faith, Inward Piety: The Dependence of Spirituality on Worship and Doctrine*,” in *For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Timothy George and Alistair McGrath (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 95-103.

⁷⁵ Miller, *Jesus Our Spiritual Director*, 33.

⁷⁶ E. Glenn Hinson, “*The Contemplative Roots of Baptist Spirituality*,” in *Ties that Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, ed. Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1994), 71.

⁷⁷ Sheldrake, 113.

Because Protestants followed the lead of the Reformers, the beauty of the disciplined life was lost in large part, resulting in a spiritual impoverishment for much of the church. This was an unfortunate development because the Apostle Paul insisted that every Christian bears some responsibility in the process of spiritual formation.⁷⁸ But Paul never saw the disciplined life as a means of meriting God's favor. Paul was a staunch defender of justification by faith.⁷⁹ Although he was deeply committed to the notion that we are saved by grace through faith (see Ephes. 2:8-9), and are shaped spiritually by the person and work of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16; Gal. 5:22), nevertheless Paul affirmed that it is each Christian's responsibility to lay hold of the grace of God. We see that same balance in Philippians 2:12-13, where Paul said, "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Far from seeing spiritual formation as a purely human endeavor, Paul saw spiritual formation as a partnership between the Christian and God. We work out our salvation precisely because God is at work in us to form us spiritually. One commentator writes, "Our work, as obedient, responsible, sensitive believers, arises out of the internal work of God: *work*, says Paul, *for* ('because') *God is at work in you*."⁸⁰ Willard helps Evangelicals understand the partnership between grace

⁷⁸ Philippians 2:12, I Cor. 9:27.

⁷⁹ Romans 5:1.

⁸⁰ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1984), 128.

and effort when he says, “Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.”⁸¹

In addition to the destructive practices of the Monasticism and the theological emphases that came out of the Reformation, Evangelicals in general and Baptists in particular, inherited a protest mentality from Reformation Anabaptists and a separatist mentality from English Puritans that further served to alienate them from other streams of Christian belief and practice.⁸² As Curtis Freeman aptly notes, “Baptist spiritual identity, thus, was forged in the crucible of theological alienation and political isolation from the dominant cultures of Europe, England, and America.”⁸³ The result was a fortress mentality among Baptists which survives to the present day. Therefore, whatever was perceived as belonging to Catholicism or the realm of mysticism, namely contemplative spiritual practices, was rejected by Baptists.⁸⁴ Where this fortress mentality exists, it prevents Evangelicals from embracing the best practices in other streams of Christian tradition.

Two further historical developments helped to shape the current practice of Evangelical spiritual formation. One was the Scholasticism of the twelfth century, which revered rationality, reason, and doing rather than being.⁸⁵ The other was the Enlightenment of the 18th century, which placed great emphasis on the power of human

⁸¹ Willard, *Spiritual Formation in Christ*, 50.

⁸² Curtis W. Freeman, “A Confession for Catholic Baptists,” in *Ties that Bind: Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, ed. Gary A. Furr and Curtis W. Freeman (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1994), 84.

⁸³ Freeman, 84.

⁸⁴ Miller, 33.

⁸⁵ Miller, 32.

reason.⁸⁶ The effect of Scholasticism and the Enlightenment on Christianity is still being felt today. Alister McGrath articulates this effect when he writes,

This demand to read, learn and understand has undoubtedly been helpful in many ways. For a start, it leads to better-informed Christians, with a much better grasp of the basic Christian beliefs. Yet in another way, it had led to spiritual impoverishment. Its emphasis on reason has been at the expense of our *imagination* and *emotions*—two God-given faculties that are meant to be fully involved in our Christian life. Spirituality is about linking thought, imagination, and feeling, as we appreciate the full richness and depth of our faith.⁸⁷

The effect of the Enlightenment has been to produce a more cerebral, intellectual, and rational approach to spirituality. This has been a characteristic trait among Evangelicals for more than a century.⁸⁸ As a result of this emphasis on knowledge, Evangelicals would separate themselves from groups that did not revere scripture in the same manner as them or that embraced practices not explicitly grounded in scripture. Evangelicals in general, and Baptists in particular, became known not only for what they believed, but also for what they did not believe. This was an unfortunate development within Evangelicalism because spirituality is about more than knowing doctrine; it is also about knowing God intimately and experientially. Spirituality is not just about serving God; it is also about enjoying God's presence. Prayer is not just about asking God for things but is about listening to the God who speaks. The great challenge for Evangelicals is to build upon their strong theological foundations with practices that inspire the imagination and

⁸⁶ Alister McGrath, "Loving God with Heart and Mind: The Theological Foundations of Spirituality," in *For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Timothy George and Alistair McGrath (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 18.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁸ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), 14, 27.

energize the emotions. If we fail to do this we will be left with an “arid evangelical rationalism” which will hinder, if not destroy, the vital power of faith.⁸⁹

The result of these historical realities has led many Evangelical Christians to the conclusion that piety results from knowing good theology, the routine of weekly worship, and resolutions to moral living. This is not entirely wrong. Devotional practitioners from the medieval monks to John Wesley in the eighteenth century would agree that the knowledge of God and piety went hand in hand.⁹⁰ Scripture would agree.⁹¹ Doctrinal preaching, worship, and participation in the sacraments are instrumental in spiritual formation. As a former professor of mine at Biblical Seminary used to say, “Faith is nurtured by the articulation of truth.”⁹² But are these means of grace sufficient to nourish and transform believers? Is this a comprehensive approach to spiritual formation? The growing hunger for intimacy with God among many Evangelicals today, particularly younger Evangelicals, is indicative that something is missing. The challenge for Evangelicals is to recover a place for contemplation, spiritual discipline, and imagination in addition to its present practices to nurture a personal, living relationship with Jesus.⁹³

⁸⁹ Alister McGrath, 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁹¹ Romans 10:17; John 17:17.

⁹² D.A. Carson, a comment shared in response to a question from a doctoral student at Biblical Seminary, Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 2004.

⁹³ Timothy George, “Introduction,” in *For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality*, ed. Timothy George and Alister McGrath (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 5.

Past and Present Examples of the Disciplined Life

The 1994 document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” issued by a group of Evangelical and Catholic leaders, was a step in the right direction. Though vigorously opposed by certain leaders within the Evangelical and Reformed traditions, it has helped to temper the centuries of animosity between Catholics and Protestants.⁹⁴ As the animosity ends, Protestants may feel more liberty to glean from their Catholic brothers and sisters certain contemplative practices that were once dismissed outright because they were “too Catholic.” Would it not be wonderful to see the ancient monastic practice of *Lectio Divina*, with its inherent opening to meditation, prayer, and contemplation, become useful in shaping the souls of mainstream Protestants?⁹⁵ When coupled with the strong biblical emphasis common among Evangelicals, the result would surely be a deeper spirituality. The two errors we want to avoid in our pursuit of Christ are passionless truth and mindless passion.

Although Richard Foster is often credited with re-introducing to the Evangelical world the practice of the spiritual disciplines, this is not an entirely new emphasis among Evangelical or Protestant believers. Christians of all eras and all traditions have sought to pattern their lives after Christ. When Evangelicals look back into their past, they will discover that spirituality and spiritual formation were distinctive features of Evangelical Christianity. For example, Richard Baxter (1615-91), illustrative of the Puritans, writes of conversing with God in solitude as one means of being conformed to the likeness of

⁹⁴ Webber, 111.

⁹⁵ Hall, 1.

Christ.⁹⁶ In addition to Puritanism, various other Evangelical movements contributed their own spiritualities, including Pietism and Methodism.⁹⁷ The Moravians, started by Jan Huss in the late fourteenth century, contributed such aids to spiritual life as the bible text for the day, the promise box, prayer meetings, and heightened emotional response through music.⁹⁸ Puritan ministers often served as spiritual directors, a work which entailed interpreting dreams, teaching others how to pray, how to grow spiritually, and how to deal with Satanic attack.⁹⁹ The great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), known for his strong biblical sermons, emphasized the need to quietly ponder scripture, to meditate on it, and to let it sink down into the soul.¹⁰⁰ He encouraged believers to practice the presence of God individually through these various means of grace. The great hymn writer, Isaac Watts (1674-1748), bemoaned the superficiality of his day and urged believers to go deeper. In his beloved hymn, “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*,” Watts encourages deep mediation and contemplation on the cross of Christ, a practice often associated with mystics. Though some Evangelicals today are critical of the use of various art forms (music, art, and stained glass) as means of grace to grow the soul, music and art were significant parts of the church’s spirituality. These profoundly theological hymns were a means of helping Christians to focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ, in much the same way that icons have held an important place

⁹⁶ Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 22.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 23.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁰ McGrath, 19.

in the faith and imagination of Christians in the East.¹⁰¹ So what we find embedded in the history of Evangelicalism are people who have sought to inform the mind and stir the heart.

One caricature of Baptists is that they are activist Marthas, while monks are contemplative Marys. Such a rigid distinction is unfounded. While many Baptists can be classified as activists, early in their history they had something in common with the contemplative tradition, namely their concern for prayer.¹⁰² If Baptists look back to the spirituality of the Puritans, through whom they trace their origins, they will gain a sense of the spiritual fervor that was present at the start of their movement but is frequently missing today. One important individual to consider is John Bunyan (1628-1688) who helped to shape and influence the early Puritan-Baptist tradition.¹⁰³ Protestants and Catholics alike have been inspired by the writings of John Bunyan. Although Bunyan was not a contemplative per se, he was nearer to the spirituality of the contemplative tradition than to the rationalism of scholasticism.¹⁰⁴ John Bunyan was devoted to prayer and zealous for holiness. Although he argued on the basis of scripture that Christians should avoid set forms of prayer, a practice embraced by monks, he did emphasize that the whole of life should be continuous prayer, a practice embraced by monks.¹⁰⁵ Bunyan lamented against lifeless prayer and argued that true prayer should be fervent, Spirit-led,

¹⁰¹ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 100.

¹⁰² Hinson, "The Contemplative Roots of Baptist Spirituality," 69.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 73.

and should engage the affections, all of which were commonplace within the contemplative tradition.¹⁰⁶ There was a genuine experiential component to the spirituality of John Bunyan. In a sense, Bunyan was a bridge between the Reformed and contemplative traditions. His theology was shaped by the likes of Luther and Calvin, but his spirituality fell into line with the contemplative tradition, particularly in his desire to have his generation prayerfully engage the living God with both their intellect and their emotions. It has even been argued that Bunyan was nearer to the contemplative tradition than to those Reformers who had few kind words for monasticism and actually closed the doors to the monasteries a century before Bunyan.¹⁰⁷ In so doing, they retained the intellectual component of the faith at the expense of the experiential.¹⁰⁸ This was a tragic loss. By God's grace, these two traditions are being reunited today.

Modern day Baptists and Evangelicals are seldom characterized as contemplative or devotional movements. But that has not always been the case. Puritanism, from which our roots derive, particularly the Puritanism practiced in New England in the seventeenth century, was very much a devotional movement.¹⁰⁹ Like the practice of Evangelicals today, Puritan spirituality's focus was strongly biblical. But there was also a strong emphasis on practicing spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, bible reading, fasting, self-examination, meditation, spiritual reading, personal writing (journaling), and bible

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁹ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), vii.

study.¹¹⁰ These devotional methods were an integral aspect of Puritan spirituality and bore similarity to the spiritual practices of their Catholic contemporaries. Puritan spirituality was rational and emotional, active and contemplative.¹¹¹ The Puritans practiced their spiritual exercises in the morning and at night before retiring. Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe writes that the Puritans viewed these spiritual exercises as “the most powerful channels through which grace might flow, whereby New Englanders attained their highest reaches of mystical experience.”¹¹² Cotton Mather (1663-1728), one of the most influential leaders of the Puritan Movement, was one of the most thoroughgoing practitioners of these devotional exercises. He meditated, prayed, and examined himself in the morning, in the evening, and then several times throughout each day.¹¹³ If a contemplative is characterized by the regular practice of personal and corporate spiritual exercises in an effort to mortify the vestiges of the old self and to be conformed more into the likeness of Jesus Christ, then Cotton Mather was an extraordinary contemplative! He was one of those rare saints who could blend together the activism of Martha and the contemplation of Mary. When Baptists look back at their beginnings, they discover that in addition to being strongly biblical and active, they were deeply mystical, imaginative, and contemplative.

¹¹⁰ Sheldrake, 120.

¹¹¹ Hambrick-Stowe, viii.

¹¹² Ibid., 156.

¹¹³ Ibid., 282-283.

The Call: To Balance Corporate Disciplines with Personal Devotion

Although a balance between activity and contemplativeness is slowly being recovered today, what often characterizes today's Protestants is the absence of spiritual disciplines at the individual level. The devotional life is missing. People are encouraged to read their bibles and pray every day, but little is done by pastors and spiritual leaders to assess whether or not parishioners are actually living in the presence of God Monday through Saturday. We are far more likely to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our programs than we are to assess the spiritual life of our members. The stress today is on Christian action, social relevance, missions, and right doctrine, rather than piety.¹¹⁴ The unspoken assumption among church leaders is that as long as parishioners are participating in corporate worship, service, and corporate prayer, though prayer meetings are scarcely attended, they are growing and maturing. We fail to realize, however, that attendance is not necessarily an indicator of spiritual growth and progress. Most pastors know people who attend church functions faithfully, tithe regularly, and give of their time to ministry, but who secretly live lives of quiet desperation and spiritual struggle.¹¹⁵ As integral as corporate practices are to spiritual and emotional health, Protestants need to recover the devotional life or the disciplined life and pastors need to lead in this process by example and intentional planning.

The imbalance between corporate and personal spiritual devotion exists at my church, the First Baptist Church of Flushing. Corporately, we have a strong and vital emphasis on missions, ministry, and the priesthood of the believer. Yet we lack a

¹¹⁴ Bloesch, 63.

¹¹⁵ Demarest, 23.

mechanism for promoting and enabling spiritual centeredness at the individual level. At the corporate level, people are encouraged to pray with others, participate in a fellowship, join a ministry team, and learn the Bible in a small group. In other words, we emphasize the corporate disciplines. Such events are programmed into the structure of our church. When it comes to personal spiritual devotion, there is little more than an encouragement from the pulpit to “spend time with the Lord in prayer and Bible reading.”

In our Chinese congregation, for example, the pastor places a strong emphasis on corporate prayer.¹¹⁶ There are three prayer meetings to choose from (two on Sunday, one on Wednesday night), yet only a small percentage of people participate. In addition, there is a prayer guide available to the prayer groups as well as to others small groups to provide direction for group prayer. In addition to prayer, the pastor says that the Chinese congregation is a task-oriented congregation. But at the personal level, the pastor acknowledges that there is no mechanism in place to determine if parishioners are living their daily lives in the presence of God and if they even know how to do that. He would like his congregation to practice the spiritual disciplines, but aside from a general encouragement from the pulpit, little is done to facilitate this process. Looking ahead, the pastor would like to see smaller groups develop whose sole focus is spiritual formation. When asked about the obstacles that need to be overcome, he mentioned two. One obstacle was the general sense of busyness in an urban setting. The other was the lack of a mechanism to make it happen. The first one cannot be changed. The second will require intentional planning.

¹¹⁶ Pastor John Wang, interview by author, Flushing, New York, 3 December 2008.

In our Spanish congregation, spiritual formation is done mostly in small groups.¹¹⁷ There are discipleship groups for beginners, intermediate, and advanced believers. There is also a couples' class and a leadership development class called URBACAD which places emphasis on theology and skill development. The goal in the Spanish congregation is to move people through four stages of spiritual development: believer, disciple, worker, and leader. The members of the Spanish congregation are eager to serve, hard to slow down, and very dependent on the pastor, although the pastor encourages people to become spiritually self-sustaining. As in our Chinese congregation, most of the spiritual growth and formation occurs in a corporate setting. But that is not for lack of effort. The pastor tried introducing moments of silence and centering into his worship service, but the people became too restless. He taught the people about the spiritual disciplines outlined in Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, but many people were averse to it because many of the disciplines appeared "too Catholic." Hence, one of the obstacles the Spanish congregation needs to overcome before they can truly learn to apply the disciplines of the faith is their anti-Catholic bias. Because many came out of Catholicism, they are averse to anything that resembles contemplation and mysticism. Another obstacle they face is their tendency to equate service with spirituality. For example, when a leader recently stepped down from his role as a deacon because his schedule was too full, his wife thought he was becoming lukewarm in his faith! Another Bible teacher threatened to move to another church when he was asked to stop teaching. For many, their spiritual identity is bound up in their service to God. The pastor himself has a vibrant spiritual life. In his personal life, he practices several different spiritual disciplines, including silence, solitude, meditation, journaling, listening to other sermons,

¹¹⁷ Pastor Raul Latoni, interview by author, Flushing, New York, 4 December 2008.

and spiritual reading. He even follows the ancient practice of pausing three times each day to focus his thoughts on God. If brothers and sisters from our Spanish congregation can learn from the good example being set by their pastor, they will be able to move past their biases and avail themselves of the rich assortment of spiritual practices.

In looking back over 2,000 years of Christian history, we discover a rather diverse approach to spirituality, spiritual formation, and piety. Unfortunately, theological considerations have forged a separatist mentality that has often blinded Evangelicals to the contributions of different streams of spirituality. When the church is at its best, it learns from and listens judiciously to the different streams and traditions within the broader Christian community, past and present, local and global, East and West. Evangelicals should be able to learn from the spirituality of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Pentecostal communities without sacrificing their theological convictions. North Americans and Europeans can and should learn from the spirituality practiced in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In our pursuit of God, we need not draw from every practice within every tradition, but certainly there is something to be gained from other traditions. And we need not only look to the past. Christianity is now a global religion. As Bradley Holt aptly observes,

It is time now for Christians in Europe and North America to listen not only to the writers of the past, but also to peoples of the present from different cultural traditions. This includes peoples of other continents as well as Native Americans and African-Americans. We can hope for a future of mutual understanding and cooperation, though that will not happen without painful struggles toward reconciliation.¹¹⁸

Thankfully, Christians in the West are beginning to adapt spiritual practices from other traditions, such as unceasing prayer, centering prayer, the proper use of icons, the

¹¹⁸ Holt, 124.

daily office, the labyrinth as an aid to prayer, keeping Sabbath, and the Ignatian Examen.

Additionally, Protestants are beginning to discover the spiritual benefit from the ascetic practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the Monastic Era, as long as they affirm the goodness of creation and are not considered a means for meriting God's favor.¹¹⁹

This is something the Apostle Paul urges upon all Christians when he writes, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."¹²⁰

Some of the early theologians agreed on the importance of ascetic disciplines, most notably Tertullian (160 - 225), Origen (ca. 185 - ca. 254), and Ephrem (306 – ca. 373).¹²¹ They maintained their theological distinctives while at the same time practicing spiritual discipline.

The next great challenge for Evangelicals in the West is to discover what God is doing among Christians in other places, particularly within Latin American, Asian and African Christianity where there is a wonderful display of spiritual power.¹²² Ian Randall comments on the spirituality being nurtured and developed in other places when he writes, "Evangelical spirituality was exported to these countries by missionaries, but as this spirituality has been absorbed it has also been transformed."¹²³ With the globalization

¹¹⁹ Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 33.

¹²⁰ I Cor. 9:24-25 NIV.

¹²¹ Holt, 33.

¹²² Ibid., 128.

¹²³ Ian Randall, *What a Friend we have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 190.

of Evangelicalism, the West is no longer the focus of power and influence. Other places now have something to offer to the broader Christian community in the rest of the world. Therefore, in countries where the Evangelical faith was originally forged but is now stagnant or in decline, there is something to be learned from non-Western places where Evangelical spirituality is thriving even as it is being developed in a distinctively non-Western manner.¹²⁴ To the degree that Evangelicals look beyond their tradition, without losing their core identity as a people with a strong commitment to the Bible, prayer, conversion, assurance, the cross of Christ, and active service, Evangelical spirituality will become richer and fuller.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 192.

CHAPTER 5

THE ART OF DEVELOPING SPIRITUALLY CENTERED DISCIPLES

A Multi-Dimensional Approach

One of the challenges I faced with this project was in knowing how to help a ministry-minded congregation that has a vital emphasis on missions, service, and corporate spirituality also to value and practice personal spiritual centeredness as a way of life so that their service to the Lord in every dimension of life was the overflow of their personal communion with God. Historically, the preferred methods of developing spiritual maturity among the brothers and sisters at First Baptist Church has been preaching, teaching, worship, fellowship, small group learning, and service. In other words, the emphasis has been with corporate disciplines. As long as people attended and participated in these group events, the unspoken assumption was that people were growing spiritually. While disciplines such as personal bible reading, prayer, and communion with God were taught and encouraged, there was no structured way of ensuring that it was happening in people's lives in a consistent and meaningful manner. As it so happens, for a number of people, it was not happening. One important discovery we made during the research phase of the project was that many people were not practicing the presence of God in a consistent manner, while some others were doing so only in a superficial or hurried manner. But many of these same people were involved in Christian activities and programs. We gathered this data by means of a survey (see

Appendix 1). This discovery was then confirmed shortly after the project began. After preaching my sermon on the spirituality of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42, at least a dozen people said to me after the service that they identified more with the active lifestyle of Martha than the spiritual balance of Mary. In other words, they were more task-oriented than contemplative. No one claimed to identify more with Mary. While such contemplatives do exist at FBC, they appear to be in the minority.

Since our congregation is as diverse as it is large, a multi-faceted approach was needed to help the congregation to live more spiritually centered lives. People are different. What motivates one person will not necessarily motivate another. A spiritual practice that helps one person may not help everyone. This became apparent at the end of the project when the pilot group that committed to using the spiritual formation handbook as a means to practicing the presence of God met together to share about their experience with the handbook. Forty-two people from the church and another small group from Bethel Seminary of the East participated in the three-month spiritual journey. For many of the participants, the handbook was just what they needed. They enjoyed participating in a directed spiritual experience. The centering prayer, the reflective questions, the devotional writings, the worship songs, and the spiritual exercises helped them to enter the presence of God. Some even said that the experience centered them. But others struggled with the structure of the handbook. For some, it was too structured. They prefer less structure and less spiritual direction in their relationship with Christ and the model of a spiritual formation handbook did not translate into a very meaningful spiritual experience. Others said it was too difficult to spend time with God three times each day.

One person even said that she was not able to get into the handbook at all. Needless to say, a one-size-fits-all approach to spiritual formation does not exist.

Listening to the Congregation

A useful place to begin when considering the methodology of promoting spiritual centeredness in a congregation is with the example set by Jesus Christ. Since Christians regard Jesus Christ as the master teacher, Christian educators, and in this case, spiritual directors, should seek to pattern their work on the teaching principles and values exemplified in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹²⁵ From the earliest days of his life, Jesus was found sitting among the teachers of Israel, both listening to them and asking them questions.¹²⁶ When looking for a method to help adults to value and practice personal spiritual formation, Jesus' example of both listening and asking questions is an important place to begin. Before we can lead adults to where we think they ought to be spiritually, we should first discover where they are by listening to them and asking them questions. The dialogue alone is an important method of helping people to understand and value spiritual centeredness. We began this dialogue during the summer of 2007, eight months before we implemented the project in March, 2008. Our strategy was to engage the congregation in conversation about their current spiritual practices and to expose them to some less familiar spiritual disciplines. We did this primarily through a survey of fifty members of the English congregation (see Appendix 1). We surveyed a cross-section of our congregation: male and female, young and old, single and married, all from a variety

¹²⁵ Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 21.

¹²⁶ Luke 2:46.

of cultural backgrounds. Most of those we surveyed have been Christians for several years and nearly all were active members of the church. The survey accomplished several things:

- it gave people an opportunity to examine their current spiritual practices;
- it introduced those surveyed to a wider array of spiritual practices than they may have been familiar;
- it brought a sense of sorrow to those who were not availing themselves of God's great invitation to live in communion with our God and Savior, Jesus Christ; and
- it gave people a sense of ownership of the project;

The results of the survey were instrumental for our project. My site team and I knew that we had found the right project when 88% of those surveyed indicated that there is a need in the English congregation to create a deeper focus on spiritual formation and 62% were willing to participate in some way. Several of those who took this survey became part of the pilot group that used the spiritual formation handbook. From the earliest stages of the project, we were listening to the congregation.

We also listened to the congregation during the implementation phase of the project. Following the sermon series on the different spiritual disciplines, the congregation was invited to sermon talk-back sessions with me and my site team. This gave people an opportunity to respond to each message in a personal way. During these half-hour sessions, people shared about their struggles to live a spiritually centered life and probed together the different ways they could apply the message to their lives. As we noted what people were saying in these sessions, it informed and reshaped both how we

created the handbook and how we led the worship services. For example, some people said they enjoyed hearing the different testimonies from other parishioners on how they encountered God in their daily living. Therefore, we included devotional readings from spiritual practitioners throughout the handbook. In the future, I plan to incorporate these living illustrations into our worship services. Others said they enjoyed the times for silent reflection that were programmed into the service following the sermons. They enjoyed having unhurried time to process the message they had just received. Because of this, I included more of these times than I originally planned.

Preaching and Teaching

Another useful method in helping a ministry-minded congregation like FBC to value and practice spiritual centeredness is the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. Because faith is nurtured by the articulation of truth, systematic preaching on topics and passages directly related to spiritual formation can help to shape a congregation's values and practices. This method of promoting spiritual change is used in other areas of church life. For example, the church sets aside the Sundays in Advent to remember and reflect upon the Incarnation of our Lord. We focus on the passion of Christ during the Sundays in Lent. The stewardship committee asks that we preach on the subject of stewardship at least annually. The idea behind this philosophy of preaching is that regular reminders on crucial topics are necessary both for remembrance and practice. A former senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Russell Rosser, used to tell the church staff that the vision and mission of the church needs to be brought before the people every twenty-eight days if we want the congregation to embrace the vision. I am not sure

how he settled on that number, but his point was that people are prone to forget and that ownership of the vision will come with regular reminders. How much more should a topic such as spiritual formation, or practicing the presence of God, be brought before the people on a regular basis? This can be done in a variety of ways. Sometimes a sermon can be given that focuses on the spiritual life of a biblical figure, such as Elijah or David or Paul or Jesus, and then illustrated by highlighting the spiritual life of a significant figure from church history. Other times a series can be given on the different spiritual disciplines and then illustrated by a member of the church who practices that discipline regularly. The point is that the pulpit is a key resource in shaping the values of a congregation.

Hands-on Learning

Another method used in teaching adults is hands-on learning. Learning by doing, as Judith Lingenfelter observes, “is an efficient way of learning something.”¹²⁷ Although preaching and teaching is a God-ordained method of nurturing one’s faith,¹²⁸ people are not always able to bridge the gap between the head and the heart. As my editor, Rajdeep Paulus once said to me, “something often slips away between Sunday and Monday.” Preaching and teaching need to be complemented with hands-on learning. Christian education should not be so passive. One Christian educator, Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, makes an insightful comment when he writes, “Maximum

¹²⁷ Lingenfelter, 37.

¹²⁸ Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 4:2

learning is always the result of maximum involvement.”¹²⁹ Therefore, to complement the preaching series on the spiritual disciplines, my site team and I provided as much hands-on learning experience for the congregation as possible. The first way we did this was by creating a contemplative worship service.¹³⁰ On Holy Thursday (March 20, 2008), we invited the congregation to the first ever contemplative worship service at First Baptist Church. This was a hands-on spiritual experience. As people arrived, they were invited to quietly take a seat and meditate on the scripture passages that were being projected through power point onto a large screen. After a brief time of corporate worship, the people were invited to spend the next hour or more at the different prayer stations (see Appendix 2). Each station gave people an opportunity to reflect, respond, and even handle the Word of God. People were invited to do as few or as many stations as they desired and could spend as much time as needed at each station. To add to the experience, the room was lit by more than 50 candles. The first prayer station looked like this:

Prayer Center No. 1
Letting Go and Letting God

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” John 12:24

Ask yourself this question:

Is there anything in my life that God wants me to let go of so that He can birth something new? Quiet your heart to listen for His voice and pray. Now pick up a seed. This represents the very thing that God wants you to let go. Bury it into the soil knowing that by allowing it to die, you are allowing God to give birth to the new seeds of your life.

¹²⁹ Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987), 78.

¹³⁰ Many of the ideas we incorporated into our contemplative service were learned at New Life Fellowship Church, Elmhurst, New York.

At another station, people sat before an icon of the Last Supper, meditated upon a portion of Matthew 26, and then took the Lord's Supper when they were ready. At another station, they sat before a cross and pondered the great sacrifice of Christ. At another station, people wrote their sins on a piece of transparency paper which they then dipped into a solution that washed away the ink as a tangible way of understanding the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. We even set up the Garden of Gethsemane! People sat before an icon of Jesus in the Garden that was projected onto a screen along with several verses from Matthew 26. One of the more memorable aspects of the night was the foot-washing station. Men, women, boys and girls all came to that station where I washed their feet just as Christ did for his disciples on that same night 2000 years earlier. Some wept during the process while others insisted on washing my feet as well. It was one of the most memorable stations. The last station was entitled The Rule of Life. People were able to write down two or three ways they will stay more connected to God during the next forty days. The feedback from the group that was gathered was very positive and many asked that we do this again.

We held another contemplative service at the end of the project with the pilot group, though not nearly as detailed as the Holy Thursday event. On the final day of the project, the pilot group gathered for a half day retreat to share about their experiences with the handbook. But before we spent time listening to each other's experience with the handbook, we spent 30 minutes in contemplative worship. We sang songs from a CD, listened as scripture was read, prayed silently, and listened to devotional readings (See Appendix 3). It was a simple service but one that people enjoyed deeply. Without preaching, we were able to enter the presence of God in a meaningful way.

Another way we gave the congregation an opportunity for hands-on learning was by creating a pre-service each Sunday before the worship service. Most Sundays from 10:50 – 11:00 A.M. we projected several verses of scripture on a screen and invited those present to prayerfully meditate and reflect on those passages as a way of preparing their hearts and souls to meet the living God during the worship service. We did this because our congregation is normally very “noisy” right up until the moment service begins and we wanted to give people a moment to center themselves. Some times the passages were related to the theme for the morning service and other times not. This was one way that the congregation was able to experience the discipline of meditation. At times, instead of displaying a portion of scripture, we used a paragraph from one of the spiritual classics. For example, on April 27, 2008, we used the following text for our pre-service:

Adapted from *Of the Imitation of Christ*, a prayer by Thomas a Kempis.

Grant me, O loving Jesus, to rest in Thee above every creature; above all health and beauty, above all glory and honor, above all power and dignity, above all knowledge and subtility, above all riches and arts, above all joy and gladness, above all fame and praise, above all sweetness and comfort, above all hope and promise, above all dessert and desire. Above all gifts and favors that Thou canst give and pour upon us, above all mirth and exultation that the mind can receive and feel; finally, all the host of Heaven, above all finally, above angels and archangels, and above all things visible and invisible, and above all that is not Thee, my God.¹³¹

Spiritual Direction

Another method used to help people live more spiritually-centered lives is spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is one of the growing trends today in the field of

¹³¹ Thomas a Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Springdale, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1981), 135.

spiritual formation.¹³² Dr. Bruce Demarest of Denver Seminary offers the following definition of spiritual direction: “Spiritual direction refers to the ministry of soul care in which a gifted and experienced Christian helps another person to grow in relationship with and obedience to God by following the example of Jesus Christ.”¹³³ Henri Nouwen says “a spiritual director is not a counselor, a therapist, or an analyst, but a mature fellow Christian to whom we choose to be accountable for our spiritual life and from whom we can expect prayerful guidance in our constant struggle to discern God’s active presence in our lives.”¹³⁴ Demarest argues that Jesus Christ was the model spiritual director who ministered spiritual direction in the first-century to those who were seekers of eternal life and to those who were already committed disciples’ of Christ.¹³⁵ As those who follow the example of Christ, spiritual leaders will strive to follow his example and serve in a similar capacity. Beyond our emphasis on preaching and teaching, pastors need to take upon themselves the pastoral task of soul-care that helps parishioners to make the journey inward. Ideally, those who make the journey inward are better prepared to live productive Christian lives.¹³⁶ Prior to the modern era, spiritual direction was practiced in the church through the centuries.¹³⁷ As a form of pastoral care, spiritual direction is being resurrected today. Spiritual direction can be implemented in a variety of ways, including

¹³² Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, ed., *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 7.

¹³³ Dr. Bruce Demarest, *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2003), 13.

¹³⁴ Henri Nouwen, “Spiritual Direction,” *Worship* 55 (1981): 402, in Dr. Bruce Demarest, *Soul Guide: Following Jesus as Spiritual Director* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2003), 40.

¹³⁵ Demarest., 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-48.

but not limited to spiritual formation groups, preaching and teaching, and one-to-one mentoring.

Our attempt at spiritual direction was a guided spiritual experience for a pilot group of 40+ members of First Baptist Church. Through the means of a spiritual formation handbook that I created in conjunction with a core group of seven individuals from the church, the pilot group was invited to come into God's presence as individuals three times a day, three days a week, for a three month period, using the ancient practice of the Daily Office. Each day, people were given three opportunities to practice the disciplines of silence, centering prayer, meditation, worship, journaling, and prayer, in addition to selected spiritual exercises (see Appendix 4). Each week, the spiritual exercises and passages for meditation focused on a different spiritual discipline. This was a guided spiritual experience. People were not simply given a manual and then sent out on their own for three months. Nor was the group invited to meet as a spiritual formation group every week. We neither wanted to add another task to people's already busy lives nor leave people completely to themselves without the encouragement that comes from the body of Christ. The group was invited to meet with me one time per month for a time of sharing, trouble-shooting, encouragement to persevere, and prayer. We also communicated through email and personal conversations during the week as people needed.

This method of using spiritual direction to promote spiritual centeredness seemed effective in our setting. At the end of the project, for example, sensing the value of spiritual direction, some from the pilot group actually suggested that people who have gone through the handbook come alongside those who may do it in the future in order to

function as spiritual directors. They recognized the value of a spiritual director. I agree with their assessment. While there is value in pursuing spiritual formation within small groups, I believe a one-to-one approach can be quite effective, particularly for men, because, as John Ackerman observes, “As a rule, in a group setting men are more reluctant to talk about their souls than women.”¹³⁸ In such cases, a spiritual director, someone well versed in the ways of the soul, can come alongside another man or woman and point them in the right direction. Another reason I prefer one-to-one direction to that of a small group that meets weekly or bi-monthly is because a small group can become another task for people who are already over-burdened with tasks and responsibilities. Professor Charlene Floyd of New York Theological Seminary made this point to me in April 2007 when I was sharing about the goals and purpose of this project with my classmates and faculty of NYTS. Rather than inviting people to one more event or gathering or group, it was suggested that informal direction would allow people the freedom to practice spiritual centeredness without adding another appointment to their PDA.

Spiritual Formation Groups

But there is value in a small group setting. Spiritual formation groups consisting of several members are another method of spiritual formation that has been practiced throughout church history - from the Benedictines in the 6th Century to Methodism in the

¹³⁸ John Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations* (An Alban Institute Publication, 1994), 105.

17th Century to Alcoholics Anonymous in the 20th Century.¹³⁹ These groups have ample biblical foundation. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24 NIV). In fact, the “one another” verses in the New Testament assume that we will meet together in community with one another. Jesus tells us, “For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (Matthew 18:20 NIV). Spiritual formation groups provide a safe environment where Christians can gather together for mutual support, mutual encouragement, and mutual accountability in the spiritual life and ask one another the question, “How is it with your soul?”¹⁴⁰ Unlike more traditional home bible studies, spiritual formation groups do not exist for the purpose of exhaustive study of scripture. There is a place for those groups in every church. Spiritual formation groups, however, meet together to pray, to practice together various spiritual disciplines such as silence, and to ask one another questions of personal examination.¹⁴¹ Renovare provides a comprehensive list of questions that can be asked in spiritual formation groups. These include but are not limited to questions like “in what ways has God made his presence known to you since our last meeting? What experiences of prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading has God given you? What difficulties or frustrations have you encountered? What joys and delights? Which spiritual disciplines did God use to lead you further into holiness of heart and life? What opportunities has God given you to serve others since our last meeting? How did you respond? Did you encounter injustice to or

¹³⁹ Renovare, “The Journey: Spiritual Formation Groups,” http://www.renovare.org/journey_spiritual_formation_groups.htm (accessed 5 January 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Renovare, “Spiritual Formation Groups – Order of Meeting,” http://www.renovare.org/journey_spiritual_formation_groups_order.htm (accessed 5 January 2008).

oppression of others? Were you able to work for justice and *shalom*? Has God provided an opportunity for you to share your faith with someone since our last meeting? How did you respond? In what ways have you encountered Christ in your reading of the Scriptures? How has the Bible shaped the way you think and live? How has God fed and strengthened you through the ministry of word and sacrament?”¹⁴² It should be readily apparent that participating in such a group will spur group members to pay attention to matters of their soul.

Leaning on the Holy Spirit

Preaching, teaching, listening, hands-on experiences, spiritual direction, and spiritual formation groups are some of the primary methods for helping a ministry-minded congregation to value and practice personal spiritual centeredness as a way of life. But one further thing is necessary for these methods to be most effective. People need to have a personal desire to grow closer to Christ. People need to hunger and thirst for the immediate presence of God, as did David when he returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). For David, the ark represented the immediate presence of God and that was what David longed for and even thirsted for (Psalm 63). Therefore, I would suggest prayer as the final method in helping a congregation to value and practice spiritual centeredness as a way of life. And in reality, this should be the first method. As a pastor and spiritual director, one of my greatest tasks in ministry is to pray for those whom God has placed under my spiritual care. In prayer, I ask God to create a hunger and thirst for the presence of God in the hearts of the brothers and sisters of First

¹⁴² Ibid.

Baptist Church so that they would avail themselves of the various means of grace provided for them by which they can grow closer to God. Unless the Lord builds the house, the Psalmist says, its laborers labor in vain.¹⁴³ In prayer, I acknowledge that the real agent of spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms. The Holy Spirit inspires. The Holy Spirit awakens. The Holy Spirit revives. The Holy Spirit creates the hunger and thirst. The Holy Spirit creates the dissatisfaction with our current spiritual condition that will cause us to seek after God. Prayer, therefore, is the primary method for fostering spiritual centeredness in any and every congregation.

¹⁴³ Psalm 127:1 NIV.

CHAPTER 6

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND EVALUATION

Goal 1 – Raise Awareness

This project was implemented at the First Baptist Church of Flushing, NY. Our first goal was “to raise awareness among the parishioners of First Baptist Church that Christian activity and missions as an end in itself can drain Christians of their vitality if they are not spiritually centered.”

Strategies for Goal 1

To accomplish this goal, we used four strategies. First, I covenanted to “weave my learning on living a spiritually centered life into a series of six sermons, each to be delivered on the first Sunday of the month, to help parishioners evaluate their own patterns of spirituality and raise awareness of the importance of balancing Christian living with the practice of spiritual formation.” I actually preached a series of seven sermons at the start of the project that helped parishioners to understand the priority and the practice of living spiritually centered lives (see Appendix 6). Before the project began, I requested permission from my advisor to preach the sermons on six consecutive weeks rather than one per month for six months. I opened the series with Luke 10:38-42. In this sermon, I compared the spirituality of Mary, who balanced being and doing and was commended by the Lord, and Martha, who was so consumed by her service to the

Lord and the quality of her service that she failed to sit at the feet of Jesus to listen to him. I wanted people to begin to realize that spending time with God, just sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen to him, can be more important than doing many things for God or doing them just right. After this sermon, I preached five sermons on specific spiritual disciplines, namely, silence and solitude (Mark 1:21-35), meditation (Psalm 1), confession (Psalm 51), fasting (Matthew 6:16-18), and keeping Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). I concluded the series with a sermon entitled *Thirsty for God* based on Psalm 63 where David was craving for the immediate presence of God.

As part of this preaching strategy, I also covenanted to have someone from our congregation who is living a spiritually centered life to share a word of testimony on how he or she practices the presence of God and the impact it makes on their life. We wanted to give people a living illustration of the different ways they could come into the presence of God.

The final detail of this strategy was “to invite parishioners to meet with me and my site team for a sermon talk-back session to discuss the impact of the sermon on their understanding of living more spiritually centered lives.” Each Sunday during this series, a different member of the church shared about his or her practice of living a spiritually centered life.

For our second strategy, I said, “for most Sundays, beginning on March 2, 2008 and concluding on November 30, 2008, I will incorporate into the order of service moments of silence, pauses for individual reflection and prayer, and other appropriate contemplative practices.” One of the weekly contemplative practices we developed was a ten minute pre-service for prayer and meditation. During the pre-service, we would

project several verses of scripture on a screen and invite people to meditate upon them. One contemplative practice that many seemed to appreciate was the period of silent reflection following the sermon for people to respond in some appropriate manner to the sermon. Prior to this project, when the sermon ended the congregation would stand to sing a hymn or chorus in response to the message. We robbed people of the power of the moments following a sermon when God's voice was still clear in their minds. Another thing we tried on one Sunday was to begin the service with the choir anthem without the choir on stage. They were hidden behind the stage and were only heard. The choir director asked people to close their eyes and reflect on the God who is here and who speaks to us. Then the choir sang. Because they were out of sight, the focus was on God alone and not the human vessel on stage.

But what was really exciting to me throughout this project was observing how different worship leaders began to catch the vision of what we were doing. Without any prompting from me, they began to change their own approach to worship. For example, almost every Sunday, different worship leaders would ask the congregation to close their eyes, quiet their hearts, and see Christ in glory before launching into a song. One of the pastors who often led in prayer would pause throughout his prayers and ask people to pray silently. Others asked people to spend a moment in silence before launching into the prayer. It was marvelous to see the ethos of our congregation beginning to change.

Our third strategy was to include passages of scripture in the Sunday bulletin most Sundays beginning March 2, 2008 and concluding on November 30, 2008. We invited the congregation to use these verses for prayer and meditation throughout the week. The passages we chose for the bulletin were taken from the devotional guide that I and my

site team members use in our personal devotions, *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People*.¹⁴⁴ The passages were not too lengthy, affording people an opportunity to read more slowly and meditatively. We provided a passage for all seven days of the week. In 2003, I attempted to lead the congregation through a one-year reading of the bible. That was a dismal failure because the passages were far too long, making it difficult for most people to keep up with the readings. For the few who did, it resulted in a superficial reading of the scriptures. Some who did not keep up dealt with the guilt of falling behind. For this project, we provided a manageable and reasonable bible reading plan for every week of the project.

Our final strategy for goal 1 was for my site team and I to develop and lead a contemplative worship service on Maundy Thursday (March 20, 2008) (see Appendix 2). At this service, the room was lit only by candle light. After a short time of worship, people were invited to visit as many of the ten prayer stations as they wanted for as long as they wanted. It was a hands-on worship and prayer experience.¹⁴⁵

Evaluation of Goal 1

To evaluate the effectiveness of the first strategy, I aimed to have at least seven people attend each sermon talk-back session and to have at least ¼ of those present be able to articulate a specific benefit they received from the sermon and the service.” The results were as follows:

March 2, 2008 Fifteen people attended the talk-back session on the sermon on Luke 10:38-42. Eight of the responses were positive. Here are some of their comments:

¹⁴⁴ Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People* (Nashville, Tennessee: Upper Room Books, 1990).

¹⁴⁵ Many of the ideas for this contemplative service were learned from New Life Fellowship, Elmhurst, NY.

- “The power point verses in the beginning of the service were very helpful in bringing about a quiet reverence for the Lord.”
- “I appreciated the scripture projected on the screen. The sermon was a good reminder that service comes from an overflow of our joy.”
- “I enjoyed the living illustration; it cemented the word that was preached.”
- “I enjoyed the opportunity to quiet my spirit in silence before the service so as to hear God.”
- One young man, a seminarian, observed that people seemed more responsive during the service and were more engaged during the worship songs.

I received the following email from one of our members later that afternoon. She wrote, “I was really blessed and challenged by your sermon today. I was just telling Lauren before the service began that I was so busy at work and it was really draining me. God knew that I needed to be reminded of these simple ideas to spend time with God and that simple is best. I really needed those reminders today.” Another email said, “I appreciated the Martha vs. Mary message. I’ve always been Martha, and everything that’s worth doing is worth doing with excellence, to the best of one’s ability. I could get carried away, I know, and simplicity eludes me...In the busyness of being a mom, it’s hard for me to make time with God, but I’m encouraged to press on.”

March 9, 2008 Twelve people attended the sermon talk-back session on the sermon on silence and solitude. Many things were shared at this session. I was able to document the following six positive responses:

- “I appreciate the practical challenge to look hard to find time for solitude, either early in the morning or late evening when the kids are asleep. I will try to give up 15-20 minutes of evening news a few times a week, and enjoy the late hour quiet time with God while the kids sleep.”
- “I appreciated hearing some of the struggles that you (me) face when you try to be silent. It was good to know that I’m not alone.”
- In an email the next day, one sister writes, “Gary, I wanted to let you know that I was again blessed by your message today. I really liked seeing how busy Jesus was and how he made time to spend with

God...that put me in my place. I am always saying I am so busy, but man, Jesus was a really busy man..."

March 16, 2008 Twelve people attended the sermon talk-back on the sermon on meditation. Seven of the responses were positive. One brother said he really enjoyed the living illustration because it gave a personal touch to the message. Another said, "I was touched by the analogy of the tree requiring deep root feeding from the waters."

March 30, 2008 Seven people attended the sermon talk-back on the sermon on fasting and prayer. Four of the responses were positive. A lot of the sharing this day was people sharing about their positive and negative experiences with fasting and with their prior misunderstanding about what fasting was.

- One college student said, "your sermon clarified that there are different kinds of fasting and it doesn't need to be 30 hours or one day but can even be one meal."
- A member of my site team said, "The questions toward the end of your sermon about when was the last time you prayed for the unity of the church, church leaders, our nation's sins, your own sin, unsaved family members, helped me to know how to focus my prayers during my times of fasting."
- Another woman said, "I am going to fast a meal or a day for the specific purpose of praying for a troubled young girl."

April 6, 2008 Eight people attended the sermon talk-back on the sermon on confession. Four of the comments were positive. I noted a trend emerging in these sessions. While some shared about the positive benefits they received from the service, most wanted to share together around the theme of the message as a way of further processing the sermon. This in itself was a positive experience. One of the brother's present said, "I appreciated in the message the concept of sharing one's faults with a mature brother or sister. When I did that in my own life in a small group it made me feel

accountable to those people as well as to God. Sharing my sin with others really made a difference for me.”

April 13, 2008 We were not able to have a sermon talk-back session that day because the congregation was invited to an emergency members’ meeting to discuss temporary removal of a member of our pastoral team for personal reasons. The sermon that day was on keeping the Sabbath.

April 20, 2008 Ten people attended the sermon talk-back session on the sermon on Psalm 63. Eight of the people present shared something positive from the sermon or the service.

- One elderly saint said, “I was helped by the sermon. As I am aging, I was struck by David’s thirst for God after having lost all of his props on account of Absalom’s rebellion. I know that I need to find my sufficiency and satisfaction in God alone in the midst of my failing health.”
- Another woman in mid-life said, “I was very challenged by this sermon and by the entire series on spiritual formation.”
- Three days later, I received a lengthy email from one of our female members. This is a synopsis of what she said, “I have to tell you that of all the sermons my favorite was definitely last week’s. The thirst for God is really the culmination of all the other sermons. I need sermons like yours to bring me back to the reality of God. Your sermons were especially helpful to my husband and my son. My husband, oh my goodness, how he’s grown! Thank you, thank you, thank you. He makes a point of every week doing exactly what you’ve preached and it is wonderful to see how God draws him closer and closer as Jesus uses you as his instrument.” I was humbled and thankful that God could use someone as ordinary as me as his vessel.

Overall, the sermon series was well-received and was a spiritually beneficial strategy for raising awareness and inspiring the congregation to pursue greater intimacy with God. After our final talk-back session, several individuals encouraged me to continue this practice even when my project is completed. One brother who did not attend any of the talk-back sessions said to me in an email, “I thought the talk-back times

should continue forever.” I thought this strange since he did not attend any of the sessions. I suppose he likes the concept of having such sessions. People benefitted from the process of sharing together about the message. It also gave people an opportunity to ask me questions that were raised in their minds but unanswered by the sermon.

To evaluate the Maundy Thursday contemplative service, I said that “at least twenty people will attend the contemplative service and at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of those present will stay after the service for a time of sharing and at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of those present will be able to articulate a specific benefit they received from the experience.” I said that I would facilitate the discussion and a member of my site team would record the comments. Approximately 35 people attended the service and 23 stayed for the evaluation process. Ray Moy recorded the following comments from those who remained after the service:

- “God spoke to me at the Hope Station.”
- “It was overwhelming. I am very grateful for the experience.”
- “I am at a loss for words. I enjoyed it a lot.”
- “I loved the quiet setting.”
- “Very humbling to have my feet washed by the pastor.”
- “Being quiet was wonderful! A great experience.” He then began to weep.
- “I was weeping at the Hope table.” She wept as she shared.
- “I’ve been a Christian 27 years. I feel like a baby in prayer. I needed this.”

To evaluate the effectiveness of the daily bible reading plan I placed in the bulletin each week, I said that “through a simple survey of the congregation on a Sunday morning I will be able to document that at least 10% of the congregation spent time each week meditating on the scripture passages from the bulletin and derived a spiritual benefit from the process.” I included the survey in the Sunday bulletin on December 8, 2008 and asked people at the end of the service to fill out the survey and return it to the ushers (see Appendix 6). One hundred two people returned the survey. Thirty people acknowledged that they used the verses most days and that it was a helpful way of

encountering God, 27 people said they used it some days each week, and 45 people said they never used those verses. Therefore, approximately 16% of the congregation used the daily bible reading plan and benefitted from it.

Goal 2 – Recruitment

Our second goal was “to recruit and orient a core team that will include my site team to examine several models of spiritual formation and to create a workbook that will help people to develop more spiritually centered lives.”

Strategies for Goal 2

To accomplish this goal, we developed four strategies. The first strategy was to recruit at least two individuals to assist me and my site team in the creation of the spiritual formation handbook. I personally invited six individuals to join our team: Eddie Dhanpat, Jr., a seminary student from Bethel Seminary of the East; Dr. Roland Leung, an English Coworker and leader of our young professionals fellowship; Iris Holder, the oldest living member of our church and also a member of our pastoral staff; Yvette Ramirez, a seminary student at Bethel Seminary of the East, leader of our hospitality ministry, and a woman who has studied the spiritual disciplines; Lauren Moy, a leader of our PAIRS ministry to married couples, and staff member of Concerts of Prayer; and Pastor Jose Figueroa, our youth pastor and also a seminary student at Bethel Seminary of the East. Only Lauren declined to participate because of a full schedule. Shortly after the core team formed, Iris Holder was in a serious car accident and spent the next several months in a hospital and rehabilitation center. Pastor Jose accepted the invitation, but shortly thereafter, took a year-long leave from his ministry. The core team was ultimately

comprised of my original site team, Ray Moy, Dr. Joseph Cina, and Marya Pier, plus Yvette Ramirez, Dr. Roland Leung, Eddie Dhanpat, Jr., and me.

The second strategy stated, “During the months of March and April, 2008 this core team will examine several existing resources on how to practice the presence of God in one’s daily life to determine which resources are suitable for a spiritual formation workbook.” Each member of the core group suggested different resources that could possibly guide us in the creation of our handbook. We did not want to recreate the wheel since a great deal of work has been published in the field of spiritual formation, spiritual direction, and contemplative spirituality in recent years. The core group met together at the end of April to brainstorm possible formats for the spiritual formation handbook based on the resources we discovered.

The third strategy stated, “In May, 2008 and in consultation with the core team, I will weave those resources together into a draft of a spiritual formation guidebook that will enable individuals to better understand how to encounter God in the course of their daily lives.” I spent the month of May creating this handbook.

The final strategy stated, “The core team will be invited to join me for a full-day retreat in June, 2008 to review and refine the guidebook. The retreat will include at least one hour for personal reflection, silence, and meditation on scripture.” At this gathering, I documented their suggestions and then used them to edit what I had originally created. The method I used at this retreat to refine the handbook was to assign to each member of the core group a different section of the handbook and ask them to spend an hour working through their assigned material as though they were actually using the book. At the end of that hour, we reconvened and everyone gave feedback on their experience with their

portion of the handbook. During the months of June and July, I refined the handbook based on the suggestions from the core group (See Appendix 5).

Evaluation of Goal 2

For goal 2 to be successful, I needed to accomplish each strategy in a timely manner. I said that the core group will gather at least five existing resources on how to become a more spiritually centered person. By the end of April, they had gathered far more than five resources to guide the preparation of the handbook. These resources included several spiritual formation workbooks and other resources from Renovare, books on prayer and spiritual disciplines, and websites on the topic of soul care, including <http://www.soulcare.com>, <http://www.pottersinn.com>, <http://www.henrinouwen.org/>, and <http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org>. One particularly helpful resource was a spiritual retreat handbook that one member of the core group, Yvette Ramirez, created as part of her Master's of Divinity program at Bethel Seminary a year earlier. Another key resource suggested was *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* by Richard Foster. This book contained more than 50 different devotional writings. Another member gave me Richard Foster's book *Prayers of the Heart*. Before Iris Holder had her car accident, she gave me Kenneth Boa's book *Conformed to His Image*. With the aid of all of these fine resources, I was able to complete the first draft of the spiritual formation handbook by May 31 so that the core group could experience and evaluate it, thus fulfilling the second evaluation criteria of this project which stated, "By the end of May, 2008, I will have completed a first draft of the workbook."

My final criteria for evaluating my second goal stated, "at least ½ of the core team (at least 3 members) will join me for the full-day retreat to review and refine the spiritual

formation workbook and through a time of sharing which I will facilitate, at least ½ of this group will articulate a specific benefit they derived from the time of personal reflection and solitude.” Six out of the seven members of the core group met together on May 31, 2008 for several hours to review and refine the handbook. Roland Leung was out of town that day. Each member of the core group derived spiritual benefit from the time they spent using the handbook. Here are some of their comments from the meeting on May 31:

- Yvette – “You do walk intimately with Christ”
- Marya – “The midday offices spoke to me at work.”
- Ray – “I spent the hour with the handbook in the park. I was enthralled and engaged. It was extremely refreshing.”
- Eddie – “The devotions were emotional and powerful.”
- Joe – “It was very good.”

Goal 3 – Implementation

Our third goal was, “To implement the spiritual formation handbook among at least twenty members of the congregation as a means of fostering spiritually centered parishioners.”

Strategies for Goal 3

To accomplish this goal, we implemented three strategies. My first strategy stated, “In June and July 2008, my site team and I will recruit a pilot group of at least twenty members by personal invitation from the congregation to use the spiritual formation workbook and at an orientation session in August 2008, I will explain how the workbook is to be used and I will ask the group to use the workbook at least three days each week for the months of September, October, and November 2008.” The core group suggested names of individuals to recruit and we each personally invited these individuals to join

the pilot group. Several of those we contacted had indicated on our survey in the summer of 2007 that they would be willing to assist with this demonstration project. After the pilot group was formed, the pilot group was invited to an orientation session on August 14 where I explained to them how to use the handbook.

The next strategy stated that once per month from September through November 2008, I will invite the pilot group to join me for a time of sharing, trouble-shooting, and contemplative worship.

Finally, I said, “I will invite this pilot group to a half-day spiritual retreat in November 2008 where they will share their experience with one another. The retreat will include time for contemplative worship.”

Evaluation of Goal 3

For this goal to be successful, we had to recruit a minimum of twenty people to comprise the pilot group that would use the handbook for the months of September, October, and November 2008. We were able to recruit 41 people. In addition to the pilot group from FBC, two of the spiritual formation groups at Bethel Seminary of the East (Flushing campus) led by Professor Richard Kantzer also used the handbook as a required text for the Fall 2008 semester. Professor Kantzer was an advisor to me throughout my three year Doctor of Ministry program and believes the handbook can be a valuable resource for seminarians. This group was not considered in the evaluation of the project.

In addition, I said that through a simple survey of the pilot group, I will be able to document that at least half of the pilot group used the workbook at least three days per week for the months of September, October, and November 2008. I also stated that “at

least half of the pilot group will attend the monthly gatherings (September and October),” and “I will be able to document that at least 1/3 of the group in attendance is deriving spiritual benefit from the workbook.” In hindsight, I believe it was unnecessary to ask about spiritual benefit at the first two gatherings. Those gatherings should have been confined to trouble-shooting and prayer with the overall evaluation reserved for the final gathering. It became redundant asking about benefits on three different occasions.

At the gathering on September 28, 20 members of the pilot group attended. At this gathering, many people shared their struggles getting acclimated to the disciplines of silence and centering as well as learning to pause three times a day to meet with God. That was to be expected because those were new experiences for almost everyone. There were six positive comments made that day. They included:

- “Doing three offices is difficult for me but it has great impact in my life.”
- “I like the songs. I feel less anxious afterwards.”
- “I liked singing the songs.”
- “When I rushed through the silence and centering, I got less out of my time.”
- “There should be even more journaling in the handbook.”

At our gathering on October 26, 2008, only 11 members of the pilot group attended, but 7 people shared about the benefits of the handbook. This is what they shared:

- “I liked the prayer walks.”
- “It was powerful prayer-walking around my school to pray for my students and coworkers.”
- “Writing down prayers helped me with my journaling. I never liked journaling before. This got me started.”
- “The midday office centered me.”
- “The devotions center me and help me to focus. At the promptings of the handbook, I have begun to fast. This has been good for me.”
- “I am now fasting every Thursday night with my wife. I still do not like journaling, but I took a prayer walk around Manhattan as I fasted from lunch one day.”

We chose to hold these first two gatherings on the last Sunday of each month following our morning worship service because we did not want to ask people to come back to the church for another meeting. We did not want to contribute to the busyness of people's lives. Our suspicion was that one reason more people did not attend was that they were not having difficulties with the handbook. Also, several of those who did not attend either of the first two group meetings had spoken with me informally on a prior occasion or through email about their experiences with the handbook.

The most important gathering of the entire project was the one held on November 22, 2008 to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the handbook. To consider this goal successful, I covenanted that "At least ½ of the pilot group will attend the half-day spiritual retreat in November 2008 and through a group discussion that I will facilitate, I will be able to document that at least 1/3 of that group achieved spiritual benefit from the workbook." Twenty-four members of the pilot group attended the half-day retreat on November 22, 2008. The agenda for the retreat was simple:

- 9:00 – 9:45 AM Breakfast
- 9:45 – 10:15 AM Contemplative Worship (see Appendix 3)
- 10:15 – 11:15 AM Personal Retreat (see Appendix 4)
- 11:30 – 12:30 PM Evaluation of Handbook

Of the 24 members present at the gathering, 22 gave a verbal evaluation of their experience with the handbook. Ray Moy documented what was shared. Of the 22 people that shared, 20 had a positive experience with the handbook. Here are some of their comments:

- "It was the first time I was that close to God. The church needs this book. It is bread."
- "Entering God's presence with centering was different than just jumping or barging into a devotional. Very helpful."

- “It brought structure into my life during a transitional period. The different offices spoke into my heart.”
- “Really enjoyed the midday offices. Gave me a moment to regain my perspective.”
- “Enjoyed meditating and soaking in scripture. Enjoyed the prayer walks.”
- “The midday offices gave me an opportunity to pray for my coworkers, something I rarely did before.”
- “The silence and centering helped me.”
- “The handbook helped me to reflect and stay centered during major national events” (referring to the presidential election and stock market).
- “I appreciated the devotional readings.”
- “The progression of steps was beneficial. Not to say that solitude and silence are the easiest things to do in the Christian life - it may well be the hardest and fasting the “easiest” in that one could do the latter without the right spirit - but spending a few weeks on these two disciplines laid the best foundation for the following disciplines.”
- “The handbook helped to shape me spiritually.”
- “Though the silence and centering time was always challenging and felt somewhat rigid and forced, I still kept at it as an exercise. Little by little the noise was not as noticeable or unsettling.”
- “With all the chaos and stresses of my life, my journey through the handbook has been calming and reflective. Thanks again.”

I also received an email one month into the handbook from a female member of the pilot group. Here is what she wrote to me:

I wanted to share the following with you: I experienced a spiritual awakening in the form of forgiveness. During one of the evening sessions I was meditating on Psalm 119, and all of a sudden I heard my voice speaking these words, “I forgive you father for abandoning me, my mother, grandmother, your brothers and sisters.” I cried buckets of tears that evening. Pastor Gary, I could not believe that this was happening to me now. I thought that I had accepted his absence in my life years ago. Obviously it was suppressed deep into my subconscious. I shared this with mom and she promised that the next time we meet we will share Psalm 119 together. Thank you for allowing me to share this with you. You are truly a blessing to FBC.

She shared a synopsis of this experience with the pilot group at the retreat.

But not everyone derived spiritual benefit from the handbook. Two of those present at the retreat said they were not able to get into the handbook. Interestingly enough, they were husband and wife. I could not discern whether it was the handbook

that was not helpful or their lack of discipline. In any event, the handbook was not particularly helpful to them. Another woman said she enjoyed the devotional classics that were included in the handbook as well as the worship songs and spiritual exercises, but said that she found the handbook a bit stifling. She prefers in-depth bible study during her devotions which was not the intent of this handbook. She said it was her first guided experience. About half of those present said it was difficult making time for three daily offices in one day. The most overlooked office was the midday office. Anticipating that would be true for a number of people, the core group suggested that we keep the midday office very short, just a few verses for meditation. Many people said they appreciated the brevity of the midday office. Overall the handbook was a positive experience for most that used it.

CHAPTER 7

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

One function of the site team was to provide an assessment of my level of competency as a minister of the gospel. During the first week of December 2006, I gave each member of my site team (Ray Moy, Joe Cina, and Marya Pier) the competency assessment instrument created by New York Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program. The purpose of this instrument is to evaluate the ministerial competencies of the candidate in 13 areas: theologian, preacher/interpreter of sacred texts, worship leader, prophetic agent, leader, religious educator, counselor, pastor, spiritual leader, ecumenist, evangelist, administrator, and professional. We agreed to spend the next month using the instrument to evaluate my competency as a pastor. On January 6, 2007, we met together to discuss our evaluations.

One of the remarkable outcomes of this experience was the close agreement my site team and I had of my strengths and weaknesses. With few exceptions, we each assigned the same qualifying word to each of the 13 areas, pinpointed the same sub-categories that needed attention or development, and identified many of the same examples from my life and ministry that demonstrated either my strengths or weaknesses.¹⁴⁶ I attribute this outcome to the longevity, depth and vulnerability of our relationships. I have known each member of my site team for 15 – 20 years. Not only

¹⁴⁶ The qualifying words included “continue, develop, and attention.” “Continue” referred to an area of strength. “Attention” and “develop” indicated a weakness to be addressed.

have we been friends and co-laborers in ministry for many years, but we were members of the same cell group from 2001 – 2004. Therefore, my site team was well-suited to assess my ministerial competencies.

My site team and I agreed that the two competencies I should address during the course of my project were that of spiritual leader and leader. According to my proposal, my goal as a spiritual leader was “to set an example for the congregation by increasing my own observance of the spiritual disciplines, particularly by practicing more contemplative prayer, silence and solitude, and regular times of personal retreat.” To develop greater competency as a spiritual leader I said I would pursue the following five strategies:

- Read *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* by Eugene Peterson;
- Meet monthly from March through October 2008 with a spiritual friend for prayer and sharing about my experience of increasing my practice of the spiritual disciplines;
- Take two full-day spiritual retreats, one near the start of my project (March 2008) and one near the middle (July 2008);
- Make entries into a spiritual journal most days; and
- Utilize *A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People* in my devotions most days.

To evaluate my growth in this competency, I said, “my spiritual friend will be able to discern and document in written form signs of growth in my practice of contemplative spirituality and my journal entries will document signs of growth in my practice of spiritual discipline and contemplative spirituality”.

I consider Peterson's book to be one of the greatest books on pastoral leadership I have ever read. According to Peterson, a pastor should not be characterized as "the busy pastor."¹⁴⁷ Peterson does not like being referred to as the "busy pastor". He writes,

The one piece of mail certain to go unread into my wastebasket is the letter addressed to the "busy pastor." Not that the phrase doesn't describe me at times, but I refuse to give my attention to someone who encourages what is worst in me.¹⁴⁸

Instead of occupying one's life with endless activities and striving to fulfill other people's expectations of what the pastor must do, Peterson believes a pastor's work is to pray, to preach, and to listen.¹⁴⁹ In fact, he believes that the primary educational task of a pastor is to teach people how to pray.¹⁵⁰ Reading Peterson has built into my life the conviction that above all else I am to be a man of prayer.

On March 26, 2008 Pastor Jose Figueroa, the youth pastor at First Baptist Church of Flushing, agreed to be my spiritual accountability partner for the duration of my project. Our goal was to meet together monthly until October for times of sharing, prayer, and mutual encouragement. Two weeks later, a crisis in Jose's life radically altered this arrangement. On Sunday, April 14, Jose informed the pastors about a personal crisis in his life that would require him to step away from his pastoral responsibilities. Jose then began a year-long sabbatical on May 1. Although things changed drastically for Jose and his family, I continued to meet him, not monthly, but several times each week in an effort to walk with him through this crisis. Throughout this process, we shared together about

¹⁴⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 17.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 19-21.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 89.

our walk with God. He queried me about some of my spiritual practices, particularly fasting, and we encouraged each other to remain faithful to the various spiritual disciplines.

Here is what Jose said about my growth in the area of contemplative spirituality:

During the past few months I have noted in my conversations with Pastor Gary that the practice of the contemplative disciplines has become increasingly important in his life. He has shared with me how he has more regular times of silence, contemplation and prayer and how the practice of these disciplines has enhanced his intimacy with God and his study of God's Word. He has shared with me how these times of solitude with God have often helped shape his sermons in a meaningful way. Pastor Gary's experience with the practice of the daily offices has helped me better appreciate a simpler lifestyle where one is devoted to intimacy with God above all other things.

I was able to take two personal spiritual retreats. Although my goal was for two full day retreats, these retreats lasted for approximately one-half day each. Because it had not been my practice to set aside a full day for such a retreat, it was difficult for me to spend one full day in prayer and meditation. A more reasonable goal would have been to take two half-day retreats. My first retreat was held on Monday April 28, 2008. I spent the time in a quiet room in the Annex building of our church. I followed Retreat Model 7 from the book *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People*.¹⁵¹ I began the retreat by reading meditatively Psalm 128 followed by a time of confession. After this, I spent 30 minutes in silence, trying to listen to the small, still voice of God. During that time of silence, I prayed repeatedly the Jesus Prayer.¹⁵² This was not intended to be a mantra that would coerce God into hearing my prayers but a means of centering me and focusing my thoughts on the Lord. After this, I spent extended time in prayer.

¹⁵¹ Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People* (Nashville, Tennessee: Upper Room Books, 1990), 366.

¹⁵² Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

My second retreat was held on September 29, 2008. I began my retreat with a lengthy prayer walk through Cunningham Park in Fresh Meadows, Queens, before returning to a quiet room at the church for a time of extended silence. After this time of silence and centering, I spent time using the spiritual formation handbook for that day. When I finished the handbook, I prayerfully meditated on a significant portion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7). I ended the retreat with 15 minutes of silence. I found these retreats to be refreshing and centering. My goal is to continue this discipline at least one time per month when the project is finished.

I have always struggled with the discipline of journaling. I would journal for a few weeks and then not write again for a few years. For this project, I was able to make 23 journal entries between March 1 and October 31. In addition, I made weekly journal entries at the end of each week in the spiritual formation handbook for the months of September, October, and November. Although I would have liked to spend more time journaling, this was a significant improvement in my overall practice. Several of those entries describe the contemplative practices that I engaged in throughout the project. I wrote about prayer walks, times of silence and solitude, and weekly times of fasting and prayer. At times I wrote down specific prayers to God. Journaling, though difficult, is a rewarding discipline.

From March 1 until August 30, I used *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People* for my daily devotions. The wonderful thing about this guide is that the scripture passages are short (usually between 5 and 20 verses), it provides seven devotional readings for each week, and it invites you to be silent. From September through November, I primarily worked through the spiritual formation handbook that I had given to the pilot

group. The handbook provided many opportunities to practice the disciplines of silence and centering, fasting, meditation, confession, and journaling.

The second ministerial competency my site team asked me to address is that of leader. Specifically, my goal was “to strengthen my ability to follow through on large plans by effectively implementing the strategies in my demonstration project.” To develop greater competency in this area of my leadership, I applied two strategies:

- Read *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing organizations* by Ken Blanchard.
- Interview a Christian leader to gain perspective on how he/she handles leadership responsibilities.

To evaluate my growth in this competency, I said, “I will be able to document that I consistently followed through on each strategy in my demonstration project and my site team will be able to document that I have shown improvement as a leader.” With the exception of not spending two full days in personal retreat, I was able to consistently follow through on each strategy in my demonstration project and the members of my site team were be able to document that I have shown improvement as a leader.

The one aspect of leadership that I found most helpful in Blanchard’s book was his emphasis on treating people right. In the context of business, Blanchard says, “The second step in leading at a higher level is to treat your customers right.”¹⁵³ Later he writes,

Servant leaders, on the other hand, feel their role is to help people achieve their goals. They constantly find out what their people need to perform well and live according to that vision. Rather than wanting people to please their bosses, servant leaders want to make a difference in the lives of their people and, in the process, impact the organization.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ken Blanchard, *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing Organizations* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007), 39.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 250.

I applied Blanchard's ideas to my work as a local church pastor. Though the congregants are not my customers, my pastoral responsibility is to treat them right by fully discharging all the duties of my ministry and by helping them to achieve their ultimate goals, namely that of being conformed into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ in every dimension of their being. Because I believed that the goals and strategies of my demonstration project would help the congregation to achieve their ultimate goals in life, I was motivated to follow through on each strategy in my demonstration project.

On November 14, 2008 I interviewed Dr. McKenzie Pier, the founder and president of Concerts of Prayer – Greater New York and the president of the New York City Leadership Center. I asked Dr. Pier how he prioritized and managed his responsibilities. He mentioned five things that shaped his role as a leader:

- (1) He always asks himself, "Why am I doing what I am doing?" This informs everything he does.
- (2) He seeks out and spends time with people who have done things on a larger scale than he has. This stretches him.
- (3) He reads a lot of books, particularly books by Bill Hybels.
- (4) He multiplies himself by building a team of "10's", people of high capacity.
- (5) He practices the spiritual disciplines.

My interview with Dr. Pier taught me that for an organization, or in my case a church, to grow and make an impact, it was important for me to build the vision, build myself, and multiply myself in other people. One reason I was able to follow through on every strategy in this project was because the site team and the core group performed many important tasks, from their development and implementation of the contemplative service, to their participation in the creation of the handbook. They are certainly what I would consider a team of high capacity people. Multiplying myself through high

capacity, gifted women and men will remain an integral part of my leadership philosophy throughout my ministry.

In looking back over this demonstration project, I consistently followed through on each strategy. The members of my site team gave me the following feedback on my development as a leader:

Dr. Joe Cina:

Clearly, the whole process of the doctoral research/dissertation – from deciding on a relevant topic, planning and implementing a sound strategy, and finally pulling together all the results in writing – qualifies as a valid means to demonstrate growth in the area of leadership and ‘following through on large plans’. Prior to this, Pastor Gary faced some challenges on tackling large projects. For example, he has had a vision to develop a second English service, but there have been some roadblocks that prevented it from getting off the ground. But in this instance, Pastor Gary did exceedingly well in leading the SITE team, organizing meetings, meeting the required deadlines, and bringing to closure every step of the plan. As a member of the SITE team, I can attest that his execution was especially superb in following through on the Contemplative Service, and the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook. Many in the congregation benefited greatly from these, as well as other parts of Pastor Gary’s work on Spiritual Formation.

Marya Pier:

Pastor Gary has demonstrated improvement as a leader in the research and design, implementation and evaluation involved in his project. Gary has always showed leadership characteristics, preached well from the pulpit and showed organization skills in ministry. He has not always shown that he has the vision or ability to take on a large plan or project that required "forward thinking" and risk in terms of exposing the congregation to the concepts involved in spiritual formation. Gary has shown by implementing the strategies in his demonstration project a new level of taking initiative and leading. As a member of the church I've seen the changes not only in the worship and style of the service but in the personal deepening of my own spiritual formation received from the messages, a deeper level of congregational worship and by using the handbook in my own daily walk with God. Pastor Gary has shown improvement not only in greater leadership in implementing his project but by modeling before us the differences in his own life gained by deepening spiritual formation.

Ray Moy:

Gary Domiano has and will always be a great teacher. One area of growth was to see Pastor Gary's passion to communicate a vision to instill a more contemplative lifestyle of worship within the congregation. Another area of growth was to see Pastor Gary's tenacity to develop and implement this plan, despite any challenges he encountered. In the past, he would be discouraged if people or plans did not follow through and he was more prone to deferring or giving up his pursuit of completing the project. For this demonstration project, although others were not supportive at times he continued on and strove to achieve the project milestones. He remained focused on his goals; held realistic expectations and sought to continue honing the elements of the demonstration project in response to constructive feedback. Pastor Gary continues to encourage congregants to approach worship with silence, solitude and reflection focusing our thoughts on our great and loving God and the least on ourselves. His teaching and personal reflections have encouraged many to a deeper appreciation and intimate relationship with our God. Through this project, Pastor Gary has also become more personable with the congregants. Through this project he developed deeper relationships and rapports with members. He now regularly engages the members during his teaching and shares of personal joys and challenges. I believe that this demonstration project has not just changed the congregants to be more contemplative, but has clearly impacted Pastor Gary to deepen his own personal relationship with God which has helped him to be a more effective minister to God's people.

I am grateful for the feedback I received from my site team. They were honest, gracious, and deeply committed to me as a person and to my development as a minister. Apart from them I would not be the man that I am today. Although the project has now been completed, it is my sincere ambition to continue to develop greater competency in my roles as a leader and spiritual leader.

CHAPTER 8

EPILOGUE

THE ROAD AHEAD

There is a feeling of satisfaction as I come to the end of this Doctor of Ministry program. I am satisfied because many people sense that something of eternal significance has been accomplished at First Baptist Church of Flushing. We raised our congregation's awareness of the importance of living spiritually centered lives. We provided a variety of corporate experiences, some familiar and some new, that enabled people to experience the presence of God. We successfully wove together elements from the Contemplative stream of spirituality into our Evangelical stream of spirituality without ruffling too many feathers. We created a reproducible spiritual formation handbook that leads people into the presence of God through a variety of spiritual disciplines. People learned that as Christians we are not always called to do something for the Lord. Sometimes we are called to sit at the feet of Jesus and do nothing except listen. People learned that sometimes the most spiritual thing one can do is to say 'no' to an opportunity to serve the Lord. People learned that being and doing in the Christian life are not mutually exclusive choices we must make but are two sides of the same coin that must not be separated. I am confident that we altered, however slightly, the DNA of the First Baptist Church of Flushing

The ethos of First Baptist Church of Flushing will continue to be its strong and vital emphasis on missions, ministry, and the priesthood of the believer. That has been the DNA of our church for decades. By God's grace, we altered that DNA by promoting and implementing a model of ministry that insists that one's service to the Lord should be the overflow of one's intimacy with the Lord. Our goal was not to eliminate, reduce, or replace our missions-mindedness, but to complete it. Although we made significant inroads, I am not so naïve as to think that a nine-month project is enough to radically alter the ethos of a church with 150 years of history. The burden is to build on the foundation that was laid these past nine months or risk losing the gains that were made.

At the final gathering of the pilot group on November 22, 2008, I asked the group to brainstorm together how we can build upon the foundation that was laid with this project. It was clear from their responses that they did not want to see this emphasis on living spiritually centered lives fall by the wayside. Here is a sample of what they suggested:

- Fine tune the spiritual formation handbook and publish it so that the wider Christian community can use it;
- Create a spiritual formation small group that new members will participate in after they complete the Membership Class and before they begin active service;
- When the spiritual formation handbook is made available to the congregation, arrange to have those who have gone through it to serve as spiritual directors to those just beginning;
- Develop quarterly contemplative services;
- Develop a Lenten devotional guide for the church;
- Implement yearly church sponsored retreats of silence and solitude;
- Create a children's version of the spiritual formation handbook so that people learn early in life to balance being with doing;
- Enable all small group leaders to begin implementing contemplative elements into small group gatherings

Professor Dick Kantzer of Bethel Seminary of the East advised and encouraged me throughout my three years in the Doctor of Ministry program at New York Theological Seminary. He sent me an email on November 18, 2008 suggesting ways that I could minister to the wider kingdom of God. He wrote,

I think it would be a useful exercise for you and certainly a contribution to the Kingdom of God for you to consider journaling or logging your progress so that by late 2008 or sometime in 2009 you would be ready to make a formal presentation in the form of teaching a round table discussion or leading a seminar or making a presentation to the faculty of Bethel Seminary of the East at a faculty retreat or faculty/center director meeting; or leading a seminar at one of our alumni half day retreats or overnight retreats; or communicating this project at a series of our community day meetings. You would need to run this by Doug Fombelle but I will be glad to communicate with him about this. Another format for doing this would be to write an article for Leadership Magazine or, of course, publishing your own book...

I am excited about the possibilities that lay ahead for the First Baptist Church of Flushing and the wider Christian community and I am eager to continue raising people's awareness to the importance of practicing a spirituality that balances being and doing. As Joe Cina said to me recently, "Here is to a new beginning at FBC." To God be the glory for the great things He has done.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Spiritual Formation Survey

1. Age: 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 over 60

2. Gender: male female

3. How long have you been a believer?

< 5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years 20+ years

4. How long have you attended FBC?

< 5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years 20+ years

5. To what extent do you practice the following spiritual disciplines?

(“Spiritual disciplines are activities undertaken to make us capable of receiving more of God’s life and power without harm to ourselves or others.” – Dallas Willard, “The Spirit of the Disciplines.”)

Meditation – the practice of reading a small passage of scripture slowly and repetitively in a spirit of contemplation and prayer

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Study – working hard to understand the Word of God

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Fasting – abstaining from food for spiritual purposes

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Prayer – time spent in worship, confession, intercession, silence

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Church Retreat – spending a day or weekend with other Christians

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Personal Retreat – an extended period of time alone with God

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Journaling – a written record of your personal reactions to spiritual matters; verses, prayers, answers to prayer, reactions/feelings, sermon notes, ways in which you see God at work in your life, etc

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Service – using our goods & strength to promote the good of others and the causes of God in our world

Daily **weekly** **monthly** **quarterly** **yearly** **never**

Silence/Solitude – purposefully abstaining from speech & interaction with other human beings so that we can listen to God and be with God

Daily weekly monthly quarterly yearly never

6. How essential do you think these disciplines are to a healthy and balanced spiritual life? (1 = not at all; 5 = essential)

1 2 3 4 5

7. How many books have you read on the spiritual disciplines?

0 1-2 3 or more

8. Do you think there is a need in the English congregation at FBC to create a deeper focus on this area? (1 = not at all; 5 = essential)

1 2 3 4 5

9. Would you be willing to participate in several small group discussions between January and September, 2008 to discuss the impact of Pastor Gary's teaching on this subject in your life?

If yes, Name: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

APPENDIX 2

First Baptist Church of Flushing

English Contemplative Service

Order of Prayer Centers

Thursday, March 20, 2008

7 p.m.

www.fbcflushing.org

Prayer Center No. 1-Letting Go and Letting God

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12:24
Ask yourself this question: Is there anything in my life that God wants me to let go of so that He can birth something new? Quiet your heart to listen for His voice and pray. Pick up a seed. This represents the very thing that God wants you to let go. Bury it into the soil knowing that by allowing it to die, you are allowing God to give birth to the new seeds of your life.

Prayer Center No. 2- Confession of Sin

Embrace your sinfulness, especially your fears and rebellions. No excuses. Then ask for God's amazing grace and mercy. Allow His love to wash over you!

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12

On the transparency sheet write down the sins that weigh down on you and prevent you from experiencing His love, grace and mercy. Ask God for forgiveness for each one on your list. Then dip the sheet in the water-filled pan and watch as God washes away your sins.

Prayer Center No. 3 - Hope

Think of the hopes that you are waiting to have fulfilled, the losses you have suffered and the tears you have shed. *"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."* Psalm 126:5-6

"You have collected all my tears in your bottle." Psalm 56:8 NLT

Take a moment to pray over the hopes that you have and the losses you've experienced. Give each one over to God. Bring Him your joys and your brokenness. He hears you, celebrates with you and weeps with you. Take a bottle and hold it in your hand and let this be a reminder that He has collected your tears.

Prayer Center No. 4- Communion

Jesus communed with His disciples before His death on the cross. The theological message is that we are invited to share in communion of Father, Son and Spirit in and through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. *"... My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples ... While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" Matthew 26: 18b, 26-28*

Participate in the communion by quietly reflecting on your relationship with God, confessing your sins to Him, taking a wafer and dipping it into the chalice and then taking the communion.

Prayer Center No. 5- Washing of Feet

Jesus modeled humility and a servant spirit to His disciples. *"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him... 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'" John 13:3-5, 14-17*

Carefully reflect upon your motivation for serving God and others. Is it out of a heart filled with love and humility or is it for other reasons? Pray that God will give you a heart to serve out of love and humility.

Then move on to Prayer Centers 6 – 8.

Prayer Center No. 6 - Garden of Gethsemane

Reflect on the picture of Jesus in the Garden praying to His Father as He prepares to make His journey to the cross. Reflect on the agony that Jesus is suffering and His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39

"He went away a second time and prayed, 'My My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done.'" Matthew 26:42

Prayer Center No. 7- The Cross

We invite you to sit or kneel next to the cross. Meditate on the passion of the Christ, the suffering He endured because of His love for you. Worship the King as you stand in awe of His greatness and mercy. *"They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on His head...and mocked Him. 'Hail, king of the Jews' they said. They spit on Him...and struck Him on the head again and again... Then they led Him away to crucify Him... They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull)... Above His head they placed the written charge against Him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."* Matthew 27:28-31,33,37

Prayer Center No. 8 - The Rule of Life

©Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Pete Scazzero, Nelson, 2006

The phrase "rule of life" comes from the Greek for "trellis." A trellis is a tool that enables a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life is a trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. It is a set of conscious guidelines, our unique combination of spiritual practices that help us keep God at the center of everything we do.

We each need a Rule of Life. Take a sheet labeled the "Rule of Life". Carefully pray about and consider two or three areas where you will take steps to keep you connected to God. Change takes time. Commit to making these few changes a consistent part of your life over the next 40 days and then commit to more changes gradually.

RULE OF LIFE

Prayer

Our lives are built on the Word of God. It is our food and primary means of revelation from Him.

1. Scripture

2. Silence and Solitude

3. Daily Office

4. Study

Rest

Stop, Rest, Delight, Contemplate

1. Sabbath

2. Simplicity

3. Play and Recreation

Activity

What is the unique call that God has in my life that I am walking in it?

1. Service and Mission

2. Care for the Physical Body

Relationships

Am I taking responsibility for my life?

1. Emotional Health

2. Family

3. Community

APPENDIX 3

Contemplative Worship

Psalm 46

Joe Cina

Opening Prayer: p. 119 handbook

Joe Cina

Worship

Marya Pier

How Great is our God Chris Tomlin

The splendor of a King, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice,
All the earth rejoice
He wraps Himself in light, and darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

How Great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end
Beginning and the end
The Godhead three in one
Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names
Worthy of all praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

How Great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Blessed Be Your Name Matt Redman

Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful
Where the streams of abundance flow
Blessed be your name
Blessed be your name when I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed be your name

Every blessing you pour out, I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name

Blessed be your name when the sun's shining down on me
When the world's all as it should be
Blessed be your name
Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be your name

Every blessing you pour out, I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name.

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Blessed be your name
(Repeat chorus)

Silence and Centering

Ray Moy

"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." Isaiah 30:15

In unison:

Almighty God, my heavenly Father: I have sinned against you, through my own fault, in thought, and word, and deed, in what I have done and what I have left undone. For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me all my offenses; and grant that I may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your Name. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

Silent Prayer 2 minutes

Scripture (Romans 8:28-39)

Max Lucado Reading

Marya Pier

Worship

Marya Pier

Here I Am to Worship Tim Hughes, UK

Light of the world

You stepped down into darkness.

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore you

Hope of a life spent with you

And here I am to worship

Here I am to bow down

Here I am to say that you're my God

You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy

Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days, oh so highly exalted

Glorious in heaven above

Humbly you came to the earth you created

All for love's sake became poor

And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
No I'll never know how much it cost

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

Come, Now is the Time to Worship **Brian Doerksen**

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God. Come

One day every tongue will confess you are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now.

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God. Come...

One day every tongue will confess you are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now.
Willingly we choose to surrender our lives
Willingly our knees will bow
With all our heart, soul, mind and strength
We gladly choose you now.

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God. Come...

Benediction and thoughts on final song

Marya Pier

In Christ Alone

Words and music by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend, 2001 Kingsway

In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all—
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid—
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
For I am His and He is mine—
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—
This is the pow'r of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home—
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

APPENDIX 4

Personal Retreat (30 Minutes)

Rest & Renewal

Spend a few minutes in silent listening.

Scripture reading: **John 6:15-40**

Read this passage slowly and thoughtfully. Don't hurry. Place yourself in the narrative using your imagination. Use your five senses.

Journal about anything (be as brief as you like; a few words are sufficient; a journal is meant to record your time not consume your time).

Write a prayer in response to your reading:

Concluding prayer: *"How good it is, my Lord, to rest and be renewed; my tiredness for your energy, my weakness for your strength. Amen."*

APPENDIX 5

PATHWAYS TO GOD'S PRESENCE

A Spiritual Formation Handbook

for the People of God

at

The First Baptist Church of Flushing

Created by:
Gary Domiano
July 2008

An Invitation to Intimacy with God

If there's a common theme among the great Christian spiritual writers it's this: Seeking God will not be easy. The history of the church is the story of many faithful Christians admirably fighting back their own sins by these [spiritual] disciplines, only to be thwarted again and again. But, as with a sport, the more you practice, the better you get. You'll get in better spiritual shape as you practice, and you'll be able to run the race to completion...even "in such a way that you may win it!"

- Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*¹

In Psalm 63:1, David wrote, “*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*” David was thirsting for God. This was not primarily a thirst for any of God’s gifts, but a thirst for the actual presence of God, the experience of God, intimacy with God, knowing God personally and intimately, not merely in memorized creeds or ancient confessions. David longed for communion with God. In fact, he longed for the presence of God more than life itself. He writes in Ps 63:3, “*because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.*” David craved intimacy with God more than any of the joys of life – family, health, food, friendship, sex, job satisfaction, books, music, the palace, sunsets, etc. Implicit in this statement is a subtle reminder – if our hearts settle on

¹ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 30-31.

the beauty of the gift and do not yearn for the infinitely greater beauty of the Giver, then we will ultimately end up dissatisfied.

This handbook has been created to help you attain what David desperately longed for, intimacy with God. Nearly every page of scripture reminds us that God longs to be in communion with us. Richard Foster writes, “in fact, the name Immanuel, meaning in Hebrew *God with us*, is the title given to the one and only Redeemer because it refers to God’s everlasting intent for human life – namely, that we should be in every aspect a dwelling place of God.”² God not only delights in giving us eternal life in Christ and with it, all the spiritual blessings of this new life, but God longs to be intimate with us. Through the Holy Spirit, God moves us towards communion with the Triune God.

But it is up to us to respond to this invitation to God’s presence. We must strive to enter into this communion. Paul exhorts us to *work out* our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13). Work it out! Create space in your life for the grace of God to work itself into the nooks and crannies of your entire being. James exhorts us to come near to God (Jam. 4:8).

How do we do this? For 2000 years, individuals and faith communities have developed certain spiritual practices in order to foster more intimate communion with God. They understood that spiritual centeredness happens as we practice the spiritual disciplines – the means of grace – that lie at the heart of our faith. As you work through this handbook, you will be given the opportunity to practice several of these disciplines as a means of experiencing deeper intimacy with God. In the

process, you will create space in your life for the grace of God to conform you more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

How to use this handbook

Each day you will have three opportunities to pause from your daily routine to enter the presence of God. This is an adaptation of the ancient practice of the *Daily Office*. The Daily Office is an opportunity for you to stop and pause at different intervals throughout the day to pay attention to God. This practice has its roots in the Old Testament. The writer of Psalm 119, for example, praised God seven times a day (Ps 119:164), while Daniel prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10). How often and how long you pause each day is entirely up to you. In the 6th century A.D. Benedict structured these prayer times around 8 daily offices, including one in the middle of the night. We won’t be so rigorous. This handbook is structured around three daily offices. Some days you will do all three. Other days you might do only one. The time you spend in God’s presence during each office can be as brief as two minutes or as long as two hours. It is entirely up to you. Each week will emphasize a different spiritual discipline.

In each office, you will find at least one passage of scripture on which to *meditate*. While we often think of reading the Bible as a process of *study*, you are encouraged to read *devotionally* as a means of satisfying your spiritual thirst. This is actually an ancient practice known as *Lectio Divina* – the reflective, prayerful and meditative reading of scripture. Whereas study is a vital spiritual discipline for understanding the meaning and structure of scripture, *Lectio* invites you to

² Lynda L. Graybeal and Julia L. Roller, *Connecting with God: A Spiritual Formation Guide* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), ix.

view the Bible as an aid to your spiritual life rather than chiefly as a source of information. We need both. For our purposes, I encourage you to read these passages devotionally, in other words, *slowly, repetitively, and prayerfully*. When God says something wonderful, stop and praise God for that. When God says something convicting, stop and confess. When God says something exciting, stop and respond to that. When God strikes awe in your heart, stop and bathe in His gracious presence and goodness.

In addition to daily scripture readings, there will be reflection questions to ponder, spiritual exercises to practice, space for journal entries, songs for worship, and sacred readings for your edification. There is great value in immersing oneself into the writings and experiences of others.

Each daily office begins with a period of silence that can last from a few seconds to several minutes. The goal of silence and centering is not to empty ourselves or to chant but to help us slow down, quiet the noise in our hearts, and focus our thoughts and attention on God. It is a way of preparing ourselves to enter the presence of God. You may find this difficult at first, but I encourage you to work at it.

You will also find written prayers throughout the handbook. They are taken from the Psalms and from devotional guides. I encourage you to pray those prayers as though they were your own. Feel free to adapt them to your unique setting if necessary.

There are nine devotionals each week (three a day for three days). You can decide which three days work best for you. I would encourage you to use the remaining days each week for more in depth study of God's Word, for extended times of prayer or for additional meditative reading of scripture.

As you embark on this three month adventure, I remind you of this wonderful invitation from our Lord: *"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

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³ The page numbers shown here reflect the numbering in the original handbook. The formatting was changed for its inclusion as an appendix.

Week One: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Devotional Reading: Excerpts from *Making All Things New* By Henri Nouwen (1932-1996).⁴

Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and a place for God, and him alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching, and guiding—we need to set aside a time and a space to give him our undivided attention. Jesus says, “Go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to the Father who is in that secret place.” (Matt 6:6, JB).

To bring some solitude into our lives is one of the most necessary but also most difficult disciplines. Even though we may have a deep desire for real solitude, we also experience a certain apprehension as we approach that solitary place and time. As soon as we are alone, without people to talk with, books to read, TV to watch, or phone calls to make, an inner chaos opens up in us.

This chaos can be so disturbing and so confusing that we can hardly wait to get busy again. Entering a private room and shutting the door, therefore, does not mean that we immediately shut out all our inner doubts, anxieties, fears, bad memories unresolved conflicts, angry feelings, and impulsive desires. On the contrary, when we have removed our outer

⁴ Henri Nouwen, “*Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*”, in *Devotional Classics*, eds. Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), 95-97.

distractions, we often find that our inner distractions manifest themselves to us in full force.

We often use these outer distractions to shield ourselves from the interior noises. It is thus not surprising that we have a difficult time being alone. The confrontation with our inner conflicts can be too painful for us to endure.

This makes the discipline of solitude all the more important. Solitude is not a spontaneous response to an occupied and preoccupied life. There are too many reasons not to be alone. Therefore we must begin by carefully planning some solitude.

Five or ten minutes a day may be all we can tolerate. Perhaps we are ready for an hour every day, an afternoon every week, a day every month, or a week every year. The amount of time will vary for each person according to temperament, age, job, lifestyle, and maturity.

The discipline of solitude allows us gradually to come in touch with this hopeful presence of God in our lives, and allows us also to taste even now the beginnings of the joy and peace which belong to the new heaven and the new earth.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *Invitation to Presence* by Wendy Miller.⁵

As we come to a place and time for prayer, we often discover that we are full of activity and noise inside. Our body may be in place, but thoughts about what happened the day (or hour)

⁵ Wendy Miller, *Invitation to Presence* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1995), 23.

before has captured our attention and led it off somewhere else. In any case, we are absent while present. To help us slow down, and to assist us in opening our attention for God, some simple exercises as we come to pray can be helpful.

Common exercises to help center ourselves:

Breathing slowly, deeply, and naturally;

Closing your eyes or lowering them to the ground;

Sitting still and comfortably;

Hearing Jesus say to you, “*come to me, all you that are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

Using a phrase from scripture when you find your thoughts wandering, such as, “*be still and know that I am God*” (Ps 46:10); “*For God alone I wait in silence*” (Ps 82:1)

Praying the Jesus prayer over and over: “*Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*”

Silence and Centering:

Spend one minute in silence, resting in the love of God. Center all your attention and desire on God and let this be the sole concern of your heart and soul.

The Request for Presence:

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1).

Opening Prayer:

O Lord my God, I long to experience your presence in my life today. Draw near to me that I might experience the abundant life in its fullest dimensions. Through Christ my Lord. Amen.

Reading:

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. (Psalm 27:3-5)

Reflection: What difficulties are you facing right now?

Reflection: How does the Psalmist cope with his troubles?

Reading:

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:32-36)

Prayer – just as Jesus prayed in the hour of his trial, bring before God the challenges that you and others are facing.

Hymn: Blessed Be Your Name Matt Redman

Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful
 Where the streams of abundance flow
 Blessed be your name
 Blessed be your name when I'm found in the desert place
 Though I walk through the wilderness
 Blessed be your name
 Every blessing you pour out, I'll turn back to praise
 When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say
 Blessed be the name of the Lord
 Blessed be your name
 Blessed be the name of the Lord,
 Blessed be your glorious name

Blessed be your name when the sun's shining down on me
 When the world's all as it should be
 Blessed be your name
 Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering
 Though there's pain in the offering
 Blessed be your name

Every blessing you pour out, I'll turn back to praise
 When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say
 Blessed be the name of the Lord
 Blessed be your name
 Blessed be the name of the Lord,
 Blessed be your glorious name.

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Blessed be your name

Every blessing you pour out, I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 – 2 minutes)

Be still, and know that I am God; (Psalm 46:10)

Reading:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young--a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah (Psalm 84:1-3).

Prayer – as the Psalmist yearned to be in the presence of God, ask God to give that same desire to you and your church.

Conclude with Silence (1 minute)

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 – 2 minutes)

In the LORD I take refuge. (Psalm 11:1)

Reading:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:1-4, 7-12)

Prayer of Examen

The prayer of examen is a spiritual practice developed by Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556). It is a prayerful self-examination of one's relationship with God over a specific period of time.

Spend several minutes reflecting over the day.

- give thanks to God for all the blessings received
- ask the Holy Spirit to search your life and then ask forgiveness for the faults/sins that emerge
- ask for God's grace to expel your sins
- conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

Final Prayer: May the Lord grant me and those I love a peaceful night and a perfect end (Book of Common Prayer).

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1-2 minutes)

Here is a testimony from a young person who has learned to practice the disciplines of silence and solitude:⁶

The more I practice this discipline, the more I appreciate the strength of silence. The less I become skeptical and judgmental, the more I learn to accept the things I didn't like about others, the more I accept them as uniquely created in the image of God. The less I talk, the fuller are words spoken at an appropriate time. The more I value others, the more I serve them in small ways, the more I enjoy and celebrate my life. The more I celebrate, the more I realize that God has been giving me wonderful things in my life, the less I worry about my future. I will accept and enjoy what God is continuously giving to me. I think I am really beginning to enjoy God.

⁶ Ibid., 165.

Take a moment to be silent before the Lord.

The Request for Presence:

I rise before dawn and cry for help (Psalm 119:147).

Jesus, I desire to start this day with you. And yet my mind keeps flitting to so many things: the projects I want to accomplish, the people I want to talk to, the people I wish I didn't have to talk to. I wonder. Are these things distractions to spiritual concentration or invitations to see God in the ordinary? I'm not sure. Jesus, I know that you are that Center who knows no distraction. So I offer up my mental fragmentation to you, O Lord my God. May my scatteredness become your gatheredness. As I'm contemplating a thousand things, Jesus, may I somehow be contemplating you. Amen.⁷

Reading:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and

⁷ Richard J. Foster, *Prayers from the Heart* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994), 41.

burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:1-8)

Reflection: What does the image of Christ as the vine and you as the branch mean to you?

Prayer – invite the Father to prune your life so that you will bear fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. Pray also for others.

Hymn: **Lamb of God** **Twila Paris** (2001)

Your only Son, no sin to hide,
But you have sent him from your side
To walk upon this guilty sod
And to become the Lamb of God

Your gift of love they crucified
They laughed and scorned him as he died
The humble King they named a fraud
And sacrificed the Lamb of God

O Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God
I love the holy Lamb of God
O wash me in His precious blood
My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 minute):

My soul finds rest in God alone; (Psalm 62:1)

Reading:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. (Psalm 91:1-6)

Prayer – praise God for his wonderful care and provision.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Spend 5 minutes, sitting upright, eyes closed, slowly inhaling and exhaling, silent before the Lord. Reflect upon one word or phrase from the 23rd Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the

shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23)

Devotional Reading: Excerpt from *Of The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis.⁸

Grant me, O loving Jesus, to rest in Thee above every creature (Rom. 8:19-22); above all health and beauty, above all glory and honor, above all power and dignity, above all knowledge and subtlety, above all riches and arts, above all joy and gladness, above all fame and praise, above all sweetness and comfort, above all hope and promise, above all desert and desire. Above all gifts and favors that Thou canst give and pour upon us, above all mirth and exaltation that the mind can receive and feel; finally, all the host of heaven, above all finally, above angels and archangels and above all the host of heaven, above all things visible and invisible, and above all that is not Thee, my God.

Reading:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author

⁸ Thomas a Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 135.

and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Reflection: What are some habits, leanings, idols, or foolish things that are entangling you and hindering your relationship with Christ? Name them, confess them and ask God to prune these things from your life.

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 – 2 minutes)

If any one is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. (John 7:37).

Reading:

My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore. (Psalm 131:1-3)

Meditative Prayer: What a picture – a child at rest with its mother – it’s a picture of peace, contentment and security. Take a moment to reflect on this image. Respond with prayer.

Hymn: How Great is our God Chris Tomlin

The splendor of a King, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice, All the earth rejoice

He wraps Himself in light, and darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice, Trembles at His voice

Refrain: How Great is our God, sing with me
 How great is our God, and all will see
 How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end
Beginning and the end

The Godhead three in one
Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb, The Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names

Worthy of all praise

My heart will sing

How great is our God. [Refrain]

Prayer – as the Psalmist prayed for Israel to put their hope in the Lord, pray for loved ones to put their hope in God.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 -2 minutes)

*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.
(Exodus 33:14)*

Reading:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Meditative Prayer: Use Paul’s prayer for the Colossians as a guide to help you pray for your local church.

☉ Day 3: Evening Office ☾

Silence and Centering

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3)

Meditative Prayer:

1. You shall have no other gods before me (Ex 20:3)
Lord, help me to detach myself from all things outside of You that compete for my ultimate affection.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol (i.e. another image of for God) (Ex 20:4)
Lord, help me not shape you according to my own fears and ideas and misconceptions, but to trust and follow you as you are revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name (Ex 20:7)
Lord, help me to guard my lips and enable me to represent you well in every conversation and interaction.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Ex 20:8)
Prepare me, even now, that I may rest from all my works and set apart a day to put away all earthly anxieties to delight in you.
5. Honor your father and your mother (Ex 20:12)
Help me to honor my parents appropriately. Help me to remember that the same way I treat them, I may be treated one day.
6. You shall not murder (Ex 20:13)
Forgive me, Lord, for where my words today brought death not life, for where they tore down rather than built up, for where they were malicious rather than sweet.
7. You shall not commit adultery (Ex 20:14)
Free me, O Lord, to live purely, rightly, and respectfully to myself and to others and forgive me for where I have not done that today.
8. You shall not steal (Ex 20:15)
Forgive me, Lord, for my greed, selfishness and refusal to share with those in need. Help me not to be greedy but to share joyfully with others.
9. You shall not give false testimony (Ex 20:16)
Lord, help me to walk in the truth and to speak the truth with love in every circumstance and to avoid falsehood and false assumptions about other people. Forgive me for where I have not done that today.
10. You shall not covet (Ex 20:17)
Lord, may I love you above all else and be content with what I have received from you.

Exercise: Calvin referred to the world as a “theater of God’s glory.”⁹ Sometime this weekend, go on a prayer walk around a lake, through a park, or some relaxing place. Pray as you walk or just enjoy the wonders of God’s creation. You may even want to bring a Bible and read Psalm 19:1-6.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

[illegible]This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 68.

Week 2: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 – 2 minutes):

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

Devotional Reading: Excerpts from *Of the Imitation of Christ: Love of Solitude and Silence* by Thomas a Kempis.¹⁰

Seek a convenient time (Eccles. 3:1) to yourself and meditate upon God's lovingkindnesses. Forsake curious questionings, but read diligently matters which rather yield contrition to your heart than occupation to your head.

The greatest of saints avoided, when they could, the society of men (Heb. 11:38), and did rather choose to live to God in secret.

A certain one has said: "As oft as I have been among men, I returned home less a man that I was before." And this we often find true, when we talk long together. It is easier altogether to hold one's peace, than not speak more words than we ought. It is easier for a man to keep himself well at home than when he is abroad.

¹⁰ Thomas a Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 41-43.

In silence and stillness a devout soul profits and learns the hidden things of the scriptures. There he finds rivers of tears, wherein he may every night (Ps. 6:6) wash and cleanse himself, that he may be more familiar with his Creator, the farther off he lives from all worldly disquiet. Whoso therefore withdraws himself from his acquaintances and friends, God will draw near unto him with his holy angels.

Reading:

Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you-- I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion. (Psalm 71:19-24)

Meditative Prayer: Re-read Psalm 71:19-24 *slowly*. Respond to God in praise, confession, or petition.

Hymn: Here I Am to Worship

Sonic Flood

Light of the world
You stepped down into darkness.
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore you
Hope of a life spent with you

And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days, oh so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly you came to the earth you created
All for love's sake became poor

And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross
No I'll never know how much it cost

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely, altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

Prayer – the Psalmist declared that he would tell of God's righteous acts all day long. Ask God to give you opportunities today to declare his mighty works through your words and your deeds.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Silence and Centering

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. (Psalm 103:8)

Reading:

*His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?
He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger.
He shakes the earth from its place
and makes its pillars tremble.
He speaks to the sun and it does not shine;
he seals off the light of the stars.
He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea.
He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.
He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted. (Job 9:4-10)*

Reflection: If you could use one word to describe God in the passage above, what would it be? When has God been mighty in your life?

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 –2 minutes)

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise. (Psalm 48:1)

Reading:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 1:8-2:2)

Journaling Exercise: During the past 24 hours:

1. Reflect on what you have to be thankful for.
2. Reflect on ways in which you have met God and were aware that God's Spirit was present.
3. Reflect on ways you have avoided or failed God. Then confess your sin and shortcoming, knowing that God is faithful and just to forgive, heal and transform you.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (1 – 2 minutes)

My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. (Psalm 62:7)

Reading:

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea

resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. (Psalm 96:7-13)

Meditative Prayer: Choose one phrase from Psalm 96 and ponder it until prayer is born in you.

Hymn: **We Fall Down** **Chris Tomlin**

We fall down, we lay our crowns
At the feet of Jesus
The greatness of, the mercy and love
At the feet of Jesus

We cry holy, holy, holy
We cry holy, holy, holy
We cry holy, holy, holy
Is the Lamb

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Silence and Centering

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. (Psalm 71:1)

Reading:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his

people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100)

Prayer: Spend a few moments just thanking God for his many blessings. Do not worry about intercession. This is a time to give thanks.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. (Psalm 4:4)

Reading:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Prayer of Examen: Scan the day that has just passed:

1. **Give thanks** – no matter how hard and troubling your day has been, there are always moments of grace if we have the eyes to see them. It may be nothing more than the air we breathe or the clothes we wear or a kind store clerk.

2. **Confess** – recall again your day, this time be alert to those times you failed to live up to God’s calling. Examine your life according to the *fruits of the Spirit* (Gal 5:22-23). Are you aware of times and places today when you chose against the way of love, when you passed by and refused to get involved? When you chose despair over joy? When you were unkind, faithless, harsh or uncontrolled? Confess these things and accept God’s forgiveness.
3. **Pray** – Conclude by praying the Lord’s Prayer slowly and thoughtfully.

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

(Matthew 6:9-13)

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (2 minutes)

LORD, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. (Psalm 90:1)

The Request for Presence:

Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. (Psalm 84:7)

Reading:

He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD. (Ps 107:33-43)

Reflection – the Psalmist urges the wise to consider God’s great love. As you consider the great love of God, respond to God in praise and then sing the following hymn.

Hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee
Who wert and art and ever more shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee
Perfect in pow'r, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth, and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Prayer for others and your church.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

A Prayer for Quiet¹¹

I have, O Lord, a noisy heart. And entering outward silence doesn't stop the inner clamor. In fact, it seems only to make it worse. When I am full of activity, the internal noise is only a distant rumble; but when I get still, the rumble amplifies itself. And it is not like the majestic sound of a symphony rising to a grand crescendo; rather it is the deafening din of clashing pots and clanging pans. What a racket! Worst of all, I feel helpless to hush the interior pandemonium.

Dear Lord Jesus, once you spoke peace to the wind and the waves. Speak your shalom over my heart. I wait silently...patiently. I receive into the very core of my being your loving command, "Peace, be still." Amen.

Reading:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:1, 25-27)

¹¹ Foster, 58.

Reflection: Reflect upon these words of Jesus and rest in the comfort and peace of the Holy Spirit.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. (Psalm 99:1)

Reading:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
Selah*

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"--and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah (Psalm 32:1-5).

Exercise: In prayer, we ask God for what we and others need in life. On the lines below, write down your requests based on the three petitions in the Lord's Prayer:

Give us this day our daily bread: Jesus invites us to pray about matters of everyday living: food, clothing, illness, problems we face, relationships – all of the mundane issues of life can be brought to God. Write down your “mundane” needs:

Forgive us our debts: We bring our sins, burdens, hurts, shortcomings, as well as the pain we have caused others.

Deliver us from evil: We offer to God the temptations we face, the desire for power, fame, money, acquisition, control – all of the many faces of evil can be brought to God.

Exercise: This weekend, go for a prayer walk through your neighborhood. Give thanks for the blessings you discover. Offer prayers of blessing for the people, homes, and shops you pass.

[illegible]

Devotional Reading: Excerpt from *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* by Madame Guyon (1648-1717):¹²

Be careful as you read. Take in fully, gently, and carefully what you are reading. Taste it and digest it as you read. In the past it may have been your habit, while reading, to move very quickly from one verse of Scripture to another until you have read the whole passage. Perhaps you were seeking to find the main point of the passage.

¹²Jeanne Guyon, “*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*”, in *Devotional Classics*, eds Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), 320-21.

After you have sensed something of the passage, and after you know that the essence of that portion has been extracted and all the deeper sense of it is gone, then, very slowly, gently, and in a calm manner begin to read the next portion of that passage. You will be surprised to find that when your time with the Lord has ended, you will have read very little, probably no more than half a page.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering (2-3 minutes):

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Let go of the tensions and troubles that fill your heart. Give them to your heavenly Father and just rest in his love for you. If a thought or internal sensation arises, give that to Jesus and re-focus your heart. Come out of this time by praying the Lord's prayer slowly.

Reading:

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and

*your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.
(Genesis 28:10-19)*

Reflection: In Gen 28:10-19, the place called Haran became sacred to Jacob because it was there that he had a profound encounter with God. What are some sacred places in your life where you have encountered God in a meaningful way?

Exercise: Re-read Genesis 28:10-19. Choose one phrase that strikes you. Turn it into a prayer for yourself and others.

Hymn: Be Thou My Vision Eleanor H. Hull (1860-1935)

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle shield, sword for my fight;
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight,
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tow'r;
Raise Thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.
Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Son!
Heart of my own heart, Whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☜

Silence and Centering (1 minute)

Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

A Prayer at Midday¹³

The Day has been breathless. Lord, I stop now for a few moments and I wonder: Is the signature of the holy over the

rush of the day? Or have I bolted ahead, anxiously trying to solve problems that do not belong to me?

Holy Spirit of God, please show me:

How to work relaxed,

How to make each task an offering of faith,

How to view interruptions as doors to service,

How to see each person as my teacher in things eternal.

In the name of him who always worked unhurried. Amen.

Reading:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41)

Meditative Prayer: Meditate on the phrase, "He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be Still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." Give Jesus the storms that are filling your heart with turmoil, fear, or anxiety.

¹³ Foster, 76.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. (Isaiah 30:15)

A Prayer for Cleansing¹⁴

Clean out, O God, the inner stream of my life:

All the duplicity
All the avarice,
All the falsity.

Search out, O Lord, the hidden motives of my life:

All the conceit,
All the anger,
All the fear.

Root out, divine Master, the destructive actions of my life:

All the manipulation,
All the scheming,
All the guile.

May the operations of faith, hope and love increase in everything I am and in everything I do. Amen.

Exercise: Set aside the next 5-10 minutes to “pray the scripture.” Use Madame Guyon’s approach:

- Choose a simple passage, such as I Cor. 1:26-31
- Read it slowly.

- Try to sense the heart of each verse before moving on.
- When something strikes you, turn it into prayer.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

Thomas a Kempis said somewhere, “*choose a suitable time for reflection and frequently consider the loving-kindness of God.*” Contemplate the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Reading: Read the following Psalm slowly and repeatedly

Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord. (Psalm 117)

Prayer – pray that our nation would fear God and minister justice to all people. Spend some time praising the Lord

Exercise: Hide Psalm 117 in your heart. Write it on a card, carry it with you, and read it frequently until memorized.

Hymn A Mighty Fortress is Our God Martin Luther

A mighty Fortress is our God, A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing;
For still our ancient Foe doth seek to work us woe
His craft and pow’r are great; And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

¹⁴ Foster, 28

Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing;
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name, From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;
The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo! His doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly pow'rs, No thanks to them abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours Through Him who with us sideth;
Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also;
The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is forever.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.
I have more insight than all my teachers,*

*for I meditate on your statutes.
I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path. (Psalm 119:97-104)*

Reflection: What are some barriers in your life to meditating on the Word of God day and night? Write them down and ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome them.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering (5 minutes):

If your mind begins to wander, try praying repetitively what ancient Christians referred to as the Jesus Prayer, “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*”

A Prayer for Cleansing¹⁵
(by A. W. Tozer)

O Lord, I have heard a good word inviting me to look away to Thee and be satisfied. My heart longs to respond, but sin has clouded my vision till I see Thee but dimly.

Be pleased to cleanse me in Thine own precious blood, and make me inwardly pure, so that I may with unveiled eyes gaze upon Thee all the days of my earthly pilgrimage. Then shall I be prepared to behold Thee in full splendor in the day when Thou shalt appear to be glorified in Thy saints and admired in all that believe. Amen.

Reading:

*Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.*

*The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.*

*I open my mouth and pant,
longing for your commands.*

*Turn to me and have mercy on me,
as you always do to those who love your name.*

*Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.*

*Redeem me from the oppression of men,
that I may obey your precepts.*

*Make your face shine upon your servant
and teach me your decrees.*

¹⁵ Foster, 29.

*Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed. (Psalm 119:129-136)*

Prayer of Examen: The Psalmist prays that no sin would rule over him and acknowledges that he weeps when others do not obey God's law. Take a moment to search your heart. Are there sins in your life (attitudes, behaviors, habits) that are ruling over you and preventing you from mourning over the sins of the world? Write them down and confess them to God.

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Exercise: Begin your day with a prayer walk. If you cannot, begin with a few minutes of silence.

Reading:

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, (Psalm 95:6-8a)

Meditative Prayer: Heed the Psalmists exhortation and spend a few minutes on your knees in worship. Try raising your hands towards heaven as you praise God.

Reading:

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest."

"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."
(Luke 9:46-62)*

Reflection: What strikes you about this passage? Write it down and then spend a few minutes praying about this.

Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus Gesangbuch Munster (1677)

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature
O Thou of God and man the Son;
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou my soul's glory, joy and crown.

Fair are the meadows, Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.

Fair is the sunshine, Fairer still the moonlight,
And fair the twinkling starry host;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer,
Than all the angels heav'n can boast.

All fairest beauty, Heavenly and earthly,
Wondrously Jesus is found in Thee;
None can be nearer, fairer, or dearer,
Than Thou my Savior art to me.

Prayer – the Psalmist assures us that “*we are the flock under God’s care.*” Bring to God the cares that burdens of your heart.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:12, 14-17).

Prayer – ask God to establish (make effective and enduring) the work of *your* hands.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

For the next few minutes, fix your mind on the love of God shown for you at the cross of Christ.

Reading:

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken. (Psalm 15)

Prayer of Examen:

Spend a moment reflecting over the day in light of Psalm 15

- ask the Holy Spirit to search your life and then ask forgiveness for the faults/sins that emerge
- ask for God’s grace to expel your sins
- conclude by giving God thanks for the cross of Christ

Exercise: The New Testament books and letters were often read aloud to the early Christians who gathered together. This weekend, take one of the shorter letters from the New Testament (2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2 Thessalonians, etc.) and read it out loud to yourself or to someone in your family in one sitting. Imagine how the first audience of Christians would have reacted upon hearing these words for the first time.

[illegible]

Devotional Reading: Excerpts from *Scala Claustralium* (*The Ladder of Monastics*) by Guigo II (ca. 1115 – ca. 1198):¹⁶

From what has been said we may gather that reading without meditation is dry. Meditation without reading is subject to error. Prayer without meditation is lukewarm. Meditation without prayer is fruitless. Prayer with devotion leads to contemplation whereas contemplation without prayer happens rarely or by a miracle.

¹⁶ Jones, 49-50, 53, 55.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Psalm 16:8)

The Call to Prayer:

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. (Psalm 95:6-7)

Hymn: O for a Thousand Tongues Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

O for a thousand tongues to sing My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace.
My gracious Master and my God, Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad, The honors of Thy name.

Jesus! The name that charms our fears, That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin, He sets the pris'ner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me.

Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, he dumb, Your loosened
tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Savior come; and leap, ye lame, for joy.

Reading:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat. (Psalm 19:1-6)*

Meditative Prayer: Re-read Ps 19:1-6 slowly, mulling over each phrase, and responding to each phrase with prayer. It's okay if you don't pray through every verse.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than

honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

Meditative Prayer: Choose one verse from vs 7-11 to pray through sufficiently. Is there something praiseworthy? Is there something to confess? Is there something to respond to?

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8)

Reading:

Who can discern his errors?

Forgive my hidden faults.

Keep your servant also from willful sins;

may they not rule over me.

Then will I be blameless,

innocent of great transgression.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight,

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:12-14)

Prayer of Examen

Think back through your day.

- Look for those events, experiences, encounters, and conversations that came as good gifts to you and give thanks to God.

- Look for signs of God's presence – maybe you saw something of God's glory in nature or in comfort you received from another and give thanks to God.
- Now be alert for moments of failure, willful sins, faults hidden from others, sins in your speech. Confess these.
- Conclude by praying the Lord's prayer (Matt 6:9-13).

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

The Request for God's Presence:

I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." (Psalm 142:5)

O God, whose love is forever seeking communion with me, help me not to hide from you in this appointed encounter but to present myself open-faced before you. This I pray through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Reading:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:1-5)

Meditative Prayer: Meditate on the image of a deer panting for streams of water. Ask the Holy Spirit to create that same spiritual hunger in you, in your church, and in those you love.

Hymn: **As the Deer** **Martin Nystrom** **(1984)**

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You.

You alone are my strength, my shield, to You alone may my spirit yield.

You alone are my hearts desire and I long to worship You.

I want You more than gold and silver, only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy Giver and the apple of my eye.

You're my friend and You are my brother, even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other, so much more than anything.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☛

Reading:

My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon--from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me-- a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,

saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:6-11)

Reflection: Psalm 42 is a lament Psalm. Why does the Psalmist grieve so deeply? What aspects of your life, or the world, cause you to grieve deeply? Write them down and give them to God.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☛

Silence and Centering

The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)

Reading:

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you downcast, O

*my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
(Psalm 43:1-5)*

Reflection: Re-read this Psalm slowly. What do you discover about God?

Meditative Prayer: Respond in prayer to what you just wrote. Is there something to praise? Indeed! Is there something to confess? Perhaps God is not your joy and delight. Perhaps you have not been putting your trust and hope in God. Stop and confess it. Is there something to respond to? Pray about that.

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

The Request for Presence:

*Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.
(Psalm 5:1-2).*

You are God; I praise you! You are Lord; I surrender to you!
You are the eternal Father; all creation worships you!
You are holy; all the angels, the cherubim and the seraphim, all the hosts of heaven, sing in endless praise:
“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the Lord Almighty;
The whole earth is full of his glory.” Amen.

Reading:

Read slowly and imagine in your mind the scene in heaven.

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"
The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped. (Revelation 5:6-14)*

Hymn: All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
Edward Perronet (1780)

All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all.
Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all

Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all.
To him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all.

Crown him, ye martyrs of your God, who from his altar call;
extol the Stem of Jesse's Rod, and crown him Lord of all.
Extol the Stem of Jesse's Rod, and crown him Lord of all.
O that with yonder sacred throng we at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song, and crown him Lord of all.
We'll join the everlasting song, and crown him Lord of all.

Prayer – as you pray for yourself and others, pray also that your church will experience a taste of that heavenly worship.

☞ **Day 3: Midday Office** ☞

Reading:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

Reflection: Write the names of those you want to see standing before the throne of Jesus. Pray for them.

☞ **Day 3: Evening Office** ☞

Reading:

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;

he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:13-17)

Prayer of Examen:

Look back over the past 24 hours. Move through this period hour by hour, situation to situation, relationship to relationship, task to task, and ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you failed God and need forgiveness. Confess and thank God that your life has already been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

Week Five: FASTING-PRAYER

Devotional Reading: John Chrysostom, one of the great theologians in the Eastern tradition, preached this:¹⁷

Dost thou fast? Give me proof of it by thy works?
Is it said by what kind of works?
If thou seest a poor man, take pity on him!
If thou seest an enemy, be reconciled to him!
If thou seest a friend gaining honor, envy him not!
If thou seest a handsome woman, pass her by!
For let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies.
Let the hands fast, by being pure from rapine and avarice.
Let the feet fast, by ceasing from running to the unlawful spectacles.
Let the eyes fast, being taught never to fix themselves rudely upon handsome countenances, or to busy themselves with strange beauties.
For looking is the food of the eyes, but if this be such as is unlawful or forbidden, it mars the fast; and upsets the whole safety of the soul; but if it be lawful and safe, it adorns fasting.
For it would be among things the most absurd to abstain from lawful food because of the fast, but with the eyes to touch even what is forbidden. Dost thou not eat flesh? Feed not upon lasciviousness by means of the eyes.

¹⁷ Jones, 165-66.

Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear consists in refusing to receive evil speakings and calumnies. “Thou shalt not receive a false report,” it says.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

Reading:

Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness. (Psalm 119:33-40)

Hymn: My Faith Has Found a Resting Place Lidie H. Edmunds (19th century)

My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument,

I need no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.

Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out.
My heart is leaning on the Word,
The written Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation through His blood.

My great Physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,
For me His life He gave.

Reading:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

Exercise: Today or tomorrow, if your health permits, fast during your lunch hour and use that time to pray.

Prayer – as the Psalmist prayed for God to turn his heart toward God’s word, ask God to turn your heart and the hearts of your brothers and sisters in Christ toward God’s word.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

Prayer – ask the Holy Spirit to make clear to you the work and ministry to which you have been called. When you pray this prayer in the future, do it during a period of fasting.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

Reading:

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the

Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

"Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

(Daniel 9:1-6, 15-19)

Reflection: Fasting is often used to express deep repentance and sorrow of sin. When is the last time you skipped a meal because you were so broken over sin in your own life or habits that control you? Spend a few moments in confession. If there is some sin or habit that controls you, plan a 12 or 24 hour food fast *this week* and devote extra time to prayer over these issues.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. (Psalm 25:1)

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard.¹⁸

Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God's word to us is a life substance, that it is not food ("bread") alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Reading:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No,

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 166.

I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

Reflection: What strikes you about this manner of living the Christian life?

Prayer – just as Paul disciplined himself so as not to be disqualified for the prize, so must we. Ask God to give you and your church leaders that same spirit and passion.

Hymn: Jesus, Thy Blood Nicolaus L von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in Thy great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through those I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which, at the mercy seat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e'en for my soul, was shed.

Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,

Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Give Us This Day¹⁹

“Give us this day our daily bread.” How do I pray those words, Lord? I live in the context of abundance. I simply do not worry where my next meal will come from. Perhaps I should pray on behalf of those who really and truly live from one meal to the next. And I do pray for them. Yet, action on their behalf is the real prayer for the poor – prayer-in-action. I do need faith daily, Jesus, and strength and patience and wisdom and love and so much more. And real material needs too. “Give us this day our daily baby sitter.” Is that how I pray for daily bread? Teach me, Father, a life of daily dependence upon you for all things—even for the bread that is already in the pantry. Amen.

Pray for your daily bread

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Evening Prayer:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

Prayer of Examen

One way Christians have examined themselves is by comparing themselves to the seven capital sins – *lust gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride*. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Ask a spiritual friend for his/her input. Confess freely to Christ.

Conclude with thanksgiving for the gift of forgiveness.

Exercise: Tomorrow, fast from a non-essential activity and spend additional time in prayer and repentance. Examples include: TV, email, web surfing, chatting on the phone, etc.

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. (Ps 37:7)

Reading:

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. (Psalm 145:1-7)

¹⁹ Foster, 86.

Lord, help me this day to love you with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind and help me to love my neighbors, my coworkers, my supervisor, those I ride with on the bus and subway, and my friends and family as I love myself. (see Matthew 22:37-39)

Reading and Prayer:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you [me] the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you [I] may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your [my] heart may be enlightened in order that you [I] may know the hope to which he has called you [me], the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephes. 1:17-20)

Hymn: Above All Paul Baloche and Kenny LeBlanc (1999)

Above all powers, above all kings
Above all nature and all created things,
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man,
You were here before the world began.

Above all kingdoms, above all thrones,
Above all wonders this world has ever known
Above all wealth, and treasures of the earth,
There's no way to measure what you're worth

Crucified, laid behind the stone
You lived to die, rejected and alone
Like a rose, trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me above all.

Exercise: If you are in the habit of listening to your iPod or reading the paper to fill your spare time each day, try fasting from these things today until evening. Use that time to pray.

☛ **Day 3: Midday Office** ☚

Reading:

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth--he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. (Psalm 33:13-19)

Reflection – the Psalmist reminds us that God is our only hope for deliverance. Ask God to impress this truth upon your heart and upon the hearts of others who need deliverance.

➡ Day 3: Evening Office ⬅

Silence and Centering (5-10 minutes if possible)

Evening Prayers: Use these Psalms as an aid to prayer.

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141:2)

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning, and your faithfulness at night. (Psalm 92:1-2)

My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Psalm 131:1-2)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin [stop and confess your sins]. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:1, 10, 12)

Final Prayer:

May the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ grant to me and those I love a peaceful night and a perfect end (Book of Common Prayer).

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 6: *FASTING-PRAYER*

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard:²⁰

In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly drink as well. This discipline teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating. It may also bring to mind how we are using food pleasure to assuage the discomforts caused in our bodies by faithless and unwise living and attitudes—lack of self-worth, meaningless work, purposeless existence, or lack of rest or exercise. If nothing else, though, it will certainly demonstrate how powerful and clever our body is in getting its own way against our strongest resolves.

Actually, fasting is one of the more important ways of practicing that self-denial required of *everyone* who would follow Christ (Matt. 16:24).

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. (Ps 37:7)

Reading:

²⁰ Willard, 166, 167.

To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy place. (Ps 28:1-2) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you [me] with power through his Spirit in your [my] inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your [my] hearts through faith. And I pray that you [I], being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you [I] may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephes. 3:16-19)

Prayer – use Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus to help you pray for yourself and your church.

Hymn: I Can Only Imagine

Mercy Me

I can only imagine
What it will be like
When I walk
By your side

I can only imagine
What my eyes will see
When your face is before me
I can only imagine

Surrounded by your Glory
What will my heart feel
Will I dance for you, Jesus
Or in awe of you be still

Will I stand in Your presence
Or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah,
Will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine

I can only imagine
When that day comes
And I find myself
Standing in the Son

I can only imagine
When all I will do
Is forever, forever worship You
I can only imagine

Exercise: Plan to skip lunch today and devote that time to prayer for friends and loved ones who are still without Christ.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☜

Midday Prayer:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. (Romans 10:1)

Spend this time in prayer – *with fasting if possible* – for the salvation of others.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☜

Silence and Centering

God is love. (1 John 4:16)

Reading:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

Concluding Prayer:

Almighty God and Father, against you, you only I have sinned, through my own fault, in my words, thoughts, and actions I have done and failed to do. In Jesus name and because of his great sacrifice, I ask you to forgive me and grant that I may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of God. Amen.

Conclude with a moment of silence.

Pray the Lord's prayer.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. (1 Peter 2:24)

Morning Prayers:

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks in all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who cares for us: Preserve me from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from me the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.²¹

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends his love and his faithfulness. (Psalm 57:1-3)

Hymn: You are My King (Amazing Love) Newsboys

I'm forgiven, because You were forsaken
I'm accepted, You were condemned
I'm alive and well, Your spirit lives within me
Because you died and rose again (repeat verse)

Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my King, would die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
It's my joy to honor you
Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my King, would die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
It's my joy to honor you
In all I do I honor you

I'm forgiven, because You were forsaken
I'm accepted, You were condemned
I'm alive and well, Your spirit lives within me
Because you died and rose again

Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my King, would die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
It's my joy to honor you
Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my King, would die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
It's my joy to honor you
In all I do I honor you

You are my king
Jesus, You are my King
You are my King
Jesus, You are my King

²¹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Springtime* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 109.

Amazing love, how can it be?
 That you, my King, would die for me
 Amazing love, I know it's true
 It's my joy to honor you
 In all I do, let me honor You
 Amazing love, how can it be?
 That you, my King, would die for me
 Amazing love, I know it's true
 It's my joy to honor you
 In all I do I honor you
 In all I do I honor you

Prayer for Yourself/Others

Exercise: One day this week, if your health permits, conduct a 24 hour food fast. Drink plenty of liquids.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☜

Reading:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

Reflection: Meditate carefully on this description of Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to create that same spirit in you.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☜

Reading:

The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, (Psalm 116:5-8)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

Prayer of Examen:

Allow Psalm 116:5-8 and James 4:7-10 to shape your prayers. Give thanks for the ways the Lord has been good to you today, mourn and repent over your sins from today, and submit yourself anew to God's will for your life.

Conclude with Silence

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. (2 Tim. 2:8)

Readings:

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. (Psalm 55:22)

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:10-13)

Reflection: What burdens are you carrying today that can be cast upon the Lord? List them and cast them upon the Lord.

Hymn: *Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)*

Chris Tomlin

Amazing grace

How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, Amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below
Will be forever mine
Will be forever mine

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in

authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:1-4)

Prayer - Spend time in prayer for your city (for example, elected officials, city workers, and the public school system). Pray for the church in the city to be an agent of salvation and justice.

➡ Day 3: Evening Office ⬅

Reading:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. (Ephesians 5:1-7)

Prayer of Examen:

Re-read Eph. 5:1-7 slowly. Allow it to examine your life for the past 24 hours. Confess sins that are revealed in you,

embrace the forgiveness of Christ, and resolve with God's help to put on robes of righteousness.

Exercise:

In the next day or so, take 12 hours to fast completely from media and technology (for example, television, radio, internet, movies, MP3 players, cell phones, etc.). Use that time to enjoy people, creation, exercise, or extended time with the Lord.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

[illegible]

Week 7: CONFESSION

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis:²²

As long as we live in the world we cannot escape temptations and tribulations. As it is written in Job, “Our life on this earth is warfare.” For this reason we must be careful and concerned about our own temptations. We must be watchful in prayer lest the devil be given an opportunity to deceive us. For the devil never sleeps but “goes about seeking whom he may devour.” Remember, no one is so holy that he or she does not have to deal with temptations. We can never be free of them.

No one is completely free of temptations because the source of temptation is in ourselves. We were born in sinful desire. When one temptation passes, another is on its way. We will always have temptation because we are sinners who lost our original innocence in the Garden. Many have tried to escape temptations only to find that they more grievously fall into them. We cannot win this battle by running away alone; the key to victory is true humility and patience; in them we overcome the enemy. Little by little, through patient endurance of spirit (with the help of God), you will win a better victory than by your own determination.

²² Thomas a Kempis, “*The Imitation of Christ*”, in *Devotional Classics*, eds Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), 184-85.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
(Col. 3:2)

Reading:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
(I Corinthians 10:12-13)

Reflection: Like Thomas a Kempis, Paul spoke about temptations and how we overcome them. According to I Cor. 10, what happens to us when we think we are standing firm?

Thomas also wrote, “If every year we uprooted a single fault, we should soon become perfect.”²³ The word *soon* may be an overstatement, but given his belief that we grow little by little, what single fault would you like to uproot in the next year?

²³ Ibid., 186.

Hymn: Amazing Grace John Newton (1725-1807)

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Prayer – just as Paul warned us to take heed that we stand lest we fall, pray that you and your church will be able to stand firm this day amidst the varied temptations we will encounter.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

Reflection: James describes the steps by which temptation becomes sin. What evil desires habitually tempt you?

Prayer – spend a few moments praying for deliverance from the evil thoughts and desires that habitually tempt you.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. (Romans 7:20)

Reading:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"--and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:1-5)

Exercise: Write your own prayer of confession.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

Reading:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:1-10)

Reflection: What incentives does John give to help us with our ongoing struggle with sin?

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray.²⁴

Beloved Christian, I do not wonder if the promise of the text [I Jn. 3:5-6] appears almost too high. Do not, I pray, let your attention be diverted to the question as to whether it would be possible to be kept for your whole life, or for so many years, without sinning. Faith has ever only to deal with the present moment. Ask this: Can Jesus at the present moment, as I abide in Him, keep me from those actual transgressions which have been the stain and the weariness of my daily life? You cannot but say: Surely He can. Take Him then at this present moment, and say, “Jesus keeps me now, Jesus saves me now.” Yield yourself to Him in earnest and believing prayer to be kept abiding, by His own abiding in you—and go into the next moment, and the succeeding hours, with this trust continually renewed. Let failure and sin, instead of discouraging you, only urge you still more to seek your safety in abiding in the Sinless One.

²⁴ Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1997), 172-73.

Prayer - Look to Jesus for strength as you prepare to enter into the spiritual battle for today.

Hymn: Take My Life and Let it Be Frances R. Havergal (1836-1879)

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Ev’ry pow’r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure store;

Take myself, and I will be,
Ever, only, all for Thee.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. (Psalm 3:3-4)

Almighty God, who through your only begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that I, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.²⁵

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; (Isaiah 1:18)

Readings:

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should

²⁵ Tickle, 357.

call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16)

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

Reflection: Both James and the writer of Proverbs remind us that confession functions within fellowship. The idea is to let trusted others know our deepest weaknesses, struggles, failures and temptations. Dallas Willard writes, “*We let some friends in Christ know who we really are, not holding back anything important, but, ideally, allowing complete transparency. We lay down the burden of hiding and pretending, which normally takes up a dreadful amount of human energy.*”²⁶ How do you react to these verses and to Willard's statement? Who is your trusted friend? Who can you ask?

²⁶ Willard, 188.

Prayer of Examen:

Look back over the past 24 hours. As you move through this period hour by hour, situation to situation, relationship to relationship, task to task, ask the Holy Spirit to search you and remind you of where you failed God and need to ask forgiveness. Now thank God that your life has already been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Consider sharing your findings with a trusted spiritual friend.

➡ Day 3: Morning Office ⬅

Silence and Centering

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

Reading:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O

God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:1-12)

Reflection: Live for a moment with the affirmation that love, not anger, brought Jesus to the cross, and that the cross is the expression of God's earnest desire to forgive. In response to that, write a short prayer of thanksgiving.

**Hymn: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross Isaac Watts
(1674-1748)**

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Prayer – pray for those who do not yet see the cross as the means of their salvation.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)

Choose one phrase from this passage for meditative prayer.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Readings:

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. (Psalm 51:4)

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

Repentance includes 3 parts:

1. Agreeing with God that it is against God and His Word that we have sinned.
2. Taking full responsibility for our actions (no excuses or blame-shifting; making restitution where possible).
3. Seeking transformation not just forgiveness (Ps 51:10)

Look back over the past 24 hours. Is there anything you need to confess to God?

- A lie you've told that has spawned other lies?
- An addiction in your life or a habit that has escalated?
- Sins of the mouth (gossip, slander, malice, abuse)?
- Pride, greed, arrogance or self-reliance?

Spend time in repentance, seeking transformation not just forgiveness, and finding comfort in the grace of God.

Week 8: CONFESSION

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from the 17th century spiritual classic *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence, who lived in France and found his growth in Christian maturity as a dish-washer in a monastery:²⁷

I think it proper to inform you after what manner I consider myself before God...I consider myself as the most wretched of men [that is, imperfect and faulty], full of sores and corruption, and who has committed all sorts of crimes against his King [that is, against his real self as God, the King, sees it]. Touched with a sensible regret, I confess to him all my wickedness [it is wicked to keep an impossible goal and fail of the good and beautiful which is my potential], I ask this forgiveness, I abandon myself in his hands that he may do what he pleases with me. The King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastising me, embraces me with love, makes me eat at his table, serves me with his own hands, gives me the keys of his treasures;...in a thousand and a thousand ways, [he blesses me].

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

It is finished. (John 19:30)

²⁷ Brother Lawrence, “*The Practice of the Presence of God*”, in *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines*, Maxie D. Dunnam (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1984), 69.

Reading:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

Reflection: What strikes you about this passage?

Hymn: My Hope is Built on Nothing Less
Edward Mote (1797-1874)

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain: On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to veil His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

His oath, His covenant, and blood,
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my home and stay. [Refrain]

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,
O may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before His throne. [Refrain]

Prayer – just as Jesus responded to Satan with scripture, ask God to give you and your church a deeper commitment to knowing scripture and greater wisdom in its application to the powers and principalities that surround us.

☞ **Day 1: Midday Office** ☞

Reading:

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. (Psalm 24:1-6)

Give Me a Clean Heart (1970)
*Margaret Pleasant Douroux*²⁸

Give me a clean heart so I may serve Thee.
Lord, fix my heart so that I may be used by Thee.
For I'm not worthy of all these blessings.
Give me a clean heart and I'll follow Thee.

I'm not asking for riches of the land.
I'm not asking for the proud to know my name.
Please give me, Lord, a clean heart, that I may follow thee.
Give me a clean heart, a clean heart and I will follow thee.

(Sometimes) I am up and sometimes I am down.
Sometimes I am almost level to the ground.

²⁸ James Melvin Washington, *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 219.

Please give me, Lord, a clean heart, that I may follow thee.
Give me a clean heart, a clean heart and I will follow thee.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Reading:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Prayer of Examen:

Spend several minutes reflecting over the day.

- give thanks to God for all the blessings received;
- ask the Holy Spirit to search your life;
- ask forgiveness for the faults/sins/errors that emerge;
- ask for God's grace to expel your sins;
- resolve with God's help to correct yourself;
- conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer slowly.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. (Luke 19:10)

Reading:

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace. (Psalm 29)

Response: Respond in prayer to this majestic Psalm!

Hymn: Crown Him with Many Crowns Matthew Bridges (1800-1894)

Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but it's own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of life, Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife For those He came to save;
His glories now we sing, Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives, that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of peace, Whose pow'r a scepter sways
From pole to pole that wars may cease, and all be prayer and
praise;
His reign shall know no end, and round His pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend their fragrance ever sweet

Crown Him the Lord of love; Behold His hands and side,
Those wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified;
All hail, Redeemer, hail! For Thou has died for me;
Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.

Prayer – ask God to make you and your church more receptive to his voice, more dependent on his power, and more humble before his majestic presence.

Exercise: Fast during your lunch hour today and devote that time to prayer and repentance.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (1 Peter 3:13-18)

Reflection: What brings you comfort from this passage?

☉ Day 2: Evening Office ☾

Reading:

Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer. How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him. In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah (Psalm 4:1-4)

Prayer of Examen:

With the Spirit's help, carefully search your heart. When sins and faults are remembered, confess them. When gifts and blessings from God are recalled, give God thanks for them. When the needs of others are remembered, intercede for them.

☉ Day 3: Morning Office ☀

Silence and Centering

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Reading:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I

love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (John 21:15-19)

Reflection: These words to Peter follow his colossal failure of the Lord. What was Jesus doing for Peter? Is there comfort here for you?

Hymn: His Name is Wonderful Audry Mieir (1959)

His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord;
He is the mighty King, master of everything,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus, my Lord.

He's the great Shepherd, the Rock of all ages,
Almighty God is He;
Bow down before Him, love and adore Him,
His name is Wonderful, Jesus, my Lord.

Prayer – just as Jesus comforted Peter after his failure, pray for others who need the comfort of God.

☉ Day 3: Midday Office ☾

Reading:

I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me. (Psalm 142)

Prayer: Feeling powerless, alone and without refuge, the Psalmist cries out to God. Do feel like the Psalmist? Cast your burdens upon the Lord.

☉ Day 3: Evening Office ☾

Silence and Centering

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, (2 Cor. 1:3)

Meditative Prayer: The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.
Help me to rely upon you in everything.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Lord Jesus, Savior, help me to recognize the blackness of my own sin and to grieve over it. Help me to weep over the sin of this world.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Lord Jesus, give me a desire to seek the interests of others advance ahead of my own.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Lord Jesus, help me to love you above all else and to crave righteousness. Lord, conform me to your will.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Lord Jesus, help me to be compassionate and gentle, especially toward the miserable, helpless and defenseless.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Holy Spirit, create in me a pure heart that I might enjoy unhindered fellowship with you.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Lord Jesus, fill me with the courage to lessen tensions, seek solutions, reconcile enemies, and resolve conflicts.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Lord, fill me with the courage to speak your name and to live the truth, even when it is not popular or convenient.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

[illegible]

Week 9: KEEPING SABBATH

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero.²⁹

Keeping the Sabbath in Scripture is a commandment—right next to refraining from lying, murdering, and committing adultery. Sabbath is a gift from God we are invited to receive.

God worked. We are to work. God rested. We are to rest. After completing his work of creating the heavens and earth, God rested on the seventh day. It was the climax of God's week in Genesis 1:1-2:4, and it is to be the climax of ours.

The Sabbath calls us to build the doing of nothing into our schedules each week. Nothing measurable is accomplished. By the world's standards it is inefficient, unproductive, and useless.

The following are four foundational qualities of biblical Sabbaths that have served me well in distinguishing a “day off” from a biblical Sabbath.

1. Stop
2. Rest
3. Delight
4. Contemplate

²⁹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Integrity, 2006), 163-171.

Sabbath is like receiving the gift of a heavy snow day every week. Stores are closed. Roads are impassable. Suddenly you have the gift of a day to do whatever you want. You don't have any obligations, pressures, or responsibilities. You have permission to play, be with friends, take a nap, read a good book. Few of us would give ourselves a "no obligation day" very often. God gives you one—every seventh day.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Reading:

*How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty!
My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the*

house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. (Psalm 84)

Reflection: What is the Psalmist's passion?

Prayer – ask God to give to you and others the passion of the Psalmist.

Hymn: Better is One Day in Your Courts

How lovely is Your dwelling place Oh Lord Almighty,
For my soul doth long And even faint For You
Oh, here my heart Is satisfied (is satisfied) Within Your
presence
I see beneath The shadow of Your wings

Refrain: Better is one day in Your courts
Better is one day in Your house
Better is one day in Your courts
Than thousands elsewhere
Better is one day in Your courts
Better is one day in Your house
Better is one day in Your courts
Than thousands elsewhere
(Than thousands elsewhere)

One thing I ask, And I would seek,
To see Your beauty To find You in The place Your glory dwells
(One thing I ask) One thing I ask And I would seek,
To see Your beauty To find You in The place Your glory dwells

Refrain

(My heart and flesh cry out) My heart and flesh cry out
For You, the Living God Your Spirit's water to my soul
I've tasted, and I've seen Come once again to me
I will draw near to You I will draw near to You To You

Refrain

Reflection: Start thinking about how you will enjoy Sabbath this week. It does not have to be Sunday, although Sunday is the best day for many of us. List two or three things you hope to do during your Sabbath rest.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father,

for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)

Meditative Prayer: Meditate upon Jesus' offer of rest to the weary. Are you weary and burdened? Give these burdens to Jesus and receive his comfort and peace.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. (Psalm 62:1)

Reading:

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

Meditative Prayer – re-read this passage one phrase at a time. Do not move on to the next phrase until it has birthed a prayer of praise, confession or response in you. It’s okay if you do not pray through the entire passage. You may even spend your entire time on just one phrase.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, under your loving gaze I consider the activities of my day. Thank you for: the warmth of the sun, the affirmation of friends, the help of fellow workers. Forgive me for: looking to my own interests, failing to encourage others, neglecting the weak. By faith I now enter the darkness of the night, declaring “It is well with my soul.” Amen.³⁰

Final Prayer: May the Lord grant me and those I love a peaceful night and a perfect end (Book of Common Prayer).

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Morning Prayer:

Good morning, Jesus. I greet you. You greet me. The dawning of a new day. “When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries: may Jesus Christ be praised!” I thank you, Lord: for the stillness of a morning just begun, for the birds whose songs somehow continue the stillness, for the warm light that slowly and surely dispels the darkness, for the hope of new beginnings. Amen.³¹

³⁰ Foster, 71.

³¹ Foster, 42.

Reading:

O house of Israel, trust in the Lord--he is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord--he is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the Lord--he is their help and shield. The Lord remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, he will bless those who fear the Lord-- small and great alike. (Ps 115:9-13)

Reading:

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (John 6:53-58)

Reflection: Meditate on Jesus’ words in John 6. Which verse stands out to you? Turn it into a prayer.

Hymn: Man of Sorrows! What a Name Philip Bliss

Man of sorrows what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Halleluia! what a savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood

Sealed my pardon with His blood
Halleluiah! what a savior!

Guilty, vile and helpless we
Spotless lamb of God was He
Full atonement can it be
Halleluiah what a savior

Lifted up was He to die
It is finished was His cry
Now in heaven exalted high
Halleluiah! what a savior!

When He comes our glorious king
All his ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we'll sing
Halleluiah! what a savior!

Prayer – the Psalmist exhorts the people of God to trust in the Lord. As an expression of your trust in God, pray over the mundane matters that you will encounter today.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Midday Prayer:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the

nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him. (Psalm 67:1-7)

Prayer – pray for others (friends, family, coworkers, neighbors) to become true worshippers of God.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, (Isaiah 30:15)

Opening Prayer:

O my soul, above all things and in all things always rest in the Lord, for he is the eternal rest of the saints. Grant me most sweet and loving Jesus, to rest in you

Above every other creature,
Above all health and beauty,
Above all glory and honor,
Above all power and dignity,
Above all knowledge and precise thought,
Above all joy and exaltation,
Above all fame and praise,
Above all sweetness and consolation,
Above all hope and promise,
Above all merit and desire,
Above all gifts and favors,
Above all happiness and joy,

Above all angels and archangels,
Above all the hosts of heaven,
Above all things visible and invisible, and
Above all that is not you, my God.

Come, come. Without you no day or hour will be happy, for you are my joy, and without you my table is empty. I shall not be silent nor will I cease to pray until your grace returns to me and you speak to me in the depths of my heart. Amen.³²

Reading:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46)

Reflection: During the past 24 hours:

1. Reflect on what you have to be thankful for
2. Reflect on ways in which you were aware that God's Spirit was present
3. Reflect on ways you have avoided or failed God. Then confess these things, knowing that God is faithful and just to forgive, heal and transform you.

³² Foster, 77.

☉ Day 3: Morning Office ☾

Silence and Centering

And he will be called...Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Reading:

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

Hymn: Majesty Jack Hayford (1981)

Majesty, worship His Majesty,

Unto Jesus, be all glory, honor and praise!

Majesty, kingdom authority, flows from His throne,

Unto His own, His anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus.

Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.

Majesty, worship His Majesty,

Jesus who died, now glorified,

King of all kings.

Prayer – begin your day with prayers of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving.

☉ Day 3: Midday Office ☾

Reading:

I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. (Psalm 18:1-6)

A Prayer of Spiritual Warfare³³

By the authority of Jesus Christ, I resist all evil powers seeking sway within me. I stand against the *fear* that makes me want to manage and control others. Grant me the gift of *faith*, O Lord, to overcome my fear. I stand against the *greed* that makes me use others for my own selfish purposes. Grant me a spirit of *generosity*, O Lord, to temper my greed. I stand against the *pride* that drives me to seek inordinate attention. Grant me the grace of *service*, O Lord, to conquer my pride. May faith, hope, and love have increasing sway over every thought and action. Amen.

³³ Foster, 103.

➡ Day 3: Evening Office ⬅

Silence and Centering

The LORD is my light and my salvation – (Psalm 27:1)

Reading:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17)

Meditative Prayer: Meditate carefully on Col. 3. Is there anything to confess? Is there anything praiseworthy?

Exercise: Treat one full day this weekend as your Sabbath. Refrain from “essential” work (chores, shopping, laundry, homework, etc). Take a walk, spend time with family or friends, read a book, worship, rest.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 10: KEEPING SABBATH

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *The Reflective Life* by Ken Gire.³⁴

Much of what is sacred is hidden in the ordinary, everyday moments of our lives. To see something of the sacred in those moments takes slowing down so we can live our lives more reflectively.

The word *reflect* comes from two Latin words: *re*, meaning “back,” and *flectere*, meaning “to bend.” To reflect, then, is to bend back something, like the way a mirror bends back an image, providing an opportunity for a closer look. Living reflectively provides opportunities during our day for a closer look at things, at people, at ourselves, and at God. The faster the pace of our life, though, the more we will miss those opportunities.

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise. (Psalm 48:1)

Reading:

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the

name of the Lord I cut them off. They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!"
(Psalm 118:9-16)

Hymn:

Shout to the Lord

My Jesus, my Savior
Lord, there is none like You;
All of my days I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love.

My shelter, my refuge,
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship you.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the works of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.

³⁴ Ken Gire, *The Reflective Life* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1998), 25.

Reading:

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:6-11)

Reflection: What does it mean to you that Jesus will come back to earth?

Prayer – as you consider the return of Christ, ask God to help you order your life so that you are ready to meet the Lord. Pray in a similar manner for your church.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞**Reading: Read slowly and meditatively**

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90:14-17)

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞**Reading:**

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still

standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:1-11)

Ken Gire writes, *"When Jesus stooped to write something on the ground, He created a pause with His silence. Into that pause flowed the crowd's attention, preparing them for the words that followed. 'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' When Jesus stooped down again, He created another pause. This time, though, what flowed into the silence was the crowd's guilt...Believers throughout the Bible were used to putting pauses into their lives. They structured pauses such as set times for daily prayers, strict observance of weekly Sabbaths, and holy days that punctuated the year, such as Passover and Yom Kippur. This habit of structuring pauses made it easier for them to take spontaneous pauses during the day, which is so essential for living a reflective life."*

Prayer of Examen:

Pause for a moment and reflect upon the previous 24 hours. Where have you seen God's goodness? Thank him for that. Where have you seen your own unfaithfulness? Confess that and resolve by the Spirit's power to leave your life of sin. Where have you encountered need in another's life? Pray for them. Ask God to make you an instrument of blessing in their life.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

O LORD my God, you are very great. (Psalm 104:1)

Reading:

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth--he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you. (Psalm 33:13-22)

Reflection: What "horses" do you trust in when you're in need?

Hymn: O Sacred Head, Once Wounded
Bernard of Clairvaux (c1150)

O sacred Head, once wounded
With grief and shame bow'd down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown,
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered,
Was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain;
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor,
Vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love for Thee.

Be near me when I'm dying,
O show Thy cross to me,

And to my succour flying,
Come, Lord and set me free.
These eyes new faith receiving,
From Jesus shall not move;
For he, who dies believing,
Dies safely through Thy love.

Prayer for Yourself/Others

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☜

Reading:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-2)

Prayer – since Paul urges us to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God, take a moment to do just that.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☜

Silence and Centering

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. (Psalm 106:1)

Reading:

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.
(1 Thessalonians 4:1-10)

Prayer of Examen

Spend several minutes reflecting over the day.

- give thanks to God for all the blessings received;
- ask the Holy Spirit to search your life;
- ask forgiveness for the faults/sins that emerge;
- ask for God's grace to expel your sins;
- share your struggles with a trusted spiritual friend;
- conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13).

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

His love endures forever. (Psalm 107:1)

Reading:

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. (Psalm 37:3-7)

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down--this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. (Psalm 62:1-8)

Reflection: The Psalmist invites us to find rest, strength and delight in the presence of the Lord. Spend a few moments responding to this in prayer.

Hymn: **Breathe** **Marie Barnett (1995)**

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me

This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me

And I ... I'm desperate for you
And I ... I'm lost without you

This is the air I breathe

Prayer for Yourself/Others

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure

in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:29-34)

Reflection: Where is your treasure? It's not hard to tell. Just follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money, your allegiance and your desire and at the end of that trail is a throne and on that throne is your treasure. Write down what you discover. Be honest.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

For God alone I wait in silence. (Psalm 82:1)

Meditative Prayer: Read the following text slowly. Stop when a word or phrase strikes you. Allow it to sink in and speak to you. Then respond to this passage in prayer.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little

ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.” (Matthew 18:1-9)

Final Prayer: May the Lord grant me and those I love a peaceful night and a perfect end (Book of Common Prayer).

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

Week 11: SERVICE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

☞ Day 1: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Taste and see that the LORD is good. (Psalm 34:8)

Reading:

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and

Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:1-10)

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *Claiming All Things for God* by George D. McClain.³⁵

The preacher or teacher who emphasizes the spiritual relationship to God may be tempted to stop at the point where Moses hides his face and to focus on Moses' naked, almost empty experience of the Holy and on the cultivation of such mountaintop experiences of God's presence. On the other hand, the preacher or teacher who emphasizes doing justice faces the opposite temptation. He or she may well skip lightly over the burning bush theophany in order to focus on the powerful subsequent text in which Yahweh reveals intimate knowledge and deep empathy for the tearful sufferings of the oppressed Hebrews in Egypt, declares the intention to deliver them from the clutches of slavery, and directs this startled Moses to go to the hated, feared Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Yet we dare neglect neither portion of the text. If social activists comprehend that Moses' call to be a liberator arises as a constituent part of an overpowering personal experience of the holy, transcendent presence of God—so overpowering that he must hide his face, so very personal that he hears himself called by his very own name, and so awesome that he removes his shoes in reverence—they cannot any longer demean

³⁵ George D. McClain, *Claiming All Things for God: Prayer, Discernment, and Ritual for Social Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 21.

personal religious experience or the cultivation of openness to the holy. And if the cultivators of religious experience comprehend that the content of Moses' overwhelming experience of the divine presence is precisely to be liberator of his people from slavery, they will no longer cultivate piety apart from pursuing justice.

Reflection: How well do you balance justice or compassion ministries with personal piety and spiritual growth? Which do you tend to emphasize? Why?

Prayer – as God sent Moses to Egypt to bring out the Israelites from slavery and oppression, pray that God would open your eyes to the needs around you and make it clear to you the work/ministry he wants you to accomplish.

Hymn: I Surrender All Judson VanDeVenter (1896)
All to Jesus I surrender;
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

Refrain: I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender;
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now. [refrain]

All to Jesus I surrender;
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel the Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine. [refrain]

All to Jesus I surrender;
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power;
Let Thy blessing fall on me. [refrain]

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Reading: Re-read verses 7-10 from the morning office.

Exercise: If we open our eyes, we will begin to see areas in our home, workplace, or society that are unjust. For example, someone in your workplace may be doing something unethical. Sometimes others are the cause, and sometimes we are the cause. Write down what you see.

Prayer – again, pray that God would make it clear to you the work/ministry he wants you to accomplish.

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. (Ps 37:7)

Reading: Re-read the passage from the morning office.

Prayer of Examen:

Use this passage to examine yourself.

- Am I concerned about those who suffer from injustice?
- Do I practice compassion for the homeless, the hungry, the naked, the orphans, the victims of abuse, etc?
- Do I guard the reputation of others or contribute to the gossip?
- Do I care about injustice on a broader scale?

Spend time in confession, surrender, and dedication of your life to serving God however he leads you.

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
(Luke 1:32)*

Reading:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Reflection: The story of Mary and Martha reminds us that some, like Mary, have gifts of contemplation and worship, and others, like Martha, have gifts of hospitality and service. As Parker Palmer wrote in *The Active Life*, “contemplation and action ought not to be at war with one another, and as long as they are, we will be at war with ourselves.”³⁶ Do you tend to identify more with Mary or Martha?

³⁶ Parker J. Palmer, “*The Active Life*”, in *Learning From Jesus: A Spiritual Formation Guide*, Lynda L. Graybeal and Julia L. Roller (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2006), 104.

Hymn: Shine, Jesus, Shine

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth you now bring us:
Shine on me, shine on me

Refrain: Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory.
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy.
Send forth your word,
Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
From the shadows into your radiance;
By the blood I may enter your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness:
Shine on me, shine on me. [Refrain]

As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
So our faces display your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,

Mirrored here may our lives tell your story:
Shine on me, shine on me. [Refrain]

Prayer – ask God to create in you and your church a balance between the contemplative spirit of Mary and the hospitality and service of Martha.

☛ Day 2: Midday Office ☚

Readings:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. (Psalm 82:3)

Reflection: Have you ever had to confront injustice? How did you respond? What are some factors that keep you from getting more involved?

☛ Day 2: Evening Office ☚

Reading:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the

nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)

Reflection: Besides the six types of people mentioned here, who are some people that might fit into the category of “the least of these”?

Prayer of Examen

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Our Father in heaven. (Matthew 6:9)

Reading:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)

Hymn: And Can It Be That I Should Gain Charles Wesley

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Savior's blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain!
For me? who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left his Father's throne above
so free, so infinite his grace;
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for O my God, it found out me!
Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
alive in him, my living Head,

and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Prayer – pray that you and your church will understand the full weight of the two great commandments. Then pray for the physical, spiritual and emotional well-being of your neighbors.

Exercise:

Write an encouraging note or email that tells someone how important they've been to you. Or write a note to someone who is struggling with something and let them know that you are praying for them and are available to talk if they need to talk. This is a simple way of showing love to our neighbor.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
(Psalm 103:6)

Prayer for the Defenseless³⁷

O LORD, hear the cry of the defenseless.
The men who are defeated by life.
The children who have no food to eat.
The homeless who have no place to sleep.

³⁷ Foster, 96.

The prisoners who have no one who cares.
The women who are beaten and abused.
The unborn who are killed in the womb.
The elderly who are shoved aside.
O LORD, hear the cry of the defenseless.
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.
(Matthew 25:31)

Reading:

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you

call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. (Isaiah 58:1-12)

Exercise: On Day 1 of this week, you listed the injustices you saw. Consider how you might be an instrument of peace or healing to one of those. What you can do? Be specific.

Journal about your experience with the Lord this week:

Week 12: SERVICE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Devotional Reading: An excerpt from *The Crisis of Piety* by Donald Bloesch.³⁸

A final guiding principle of a theology of devotion is social relevance. Devotion to Christ must be expressed in the public as well as in the private areas of life. We cannot compartmentalize our religion; Christ is Lord of the whole of life. We cannot worship God on Sundays and yet remain silent when open villages are bombed in South Vietnam or when fruit pickers imported from Mexico are denied a living wage in California. At the same time this does not mean that Christian faith will ever be identified or conjoined with any social philosophy or ideology. The ultimate loyalty of the Christian is to a spiritual Lord, and this means that although he will serve in the world and sometimes even engage in political action, his motivations and goals will always be different from those of the man of the world. Sometimes the Christian will be politically to the right (when, for example, he enters the battle against pornographic literature), and sometimes he be politically to the left (as, for example, in protests against weapons of mass extermination). But the Christian, that is, a man totally committed to Christ, will be intimately involved in the social and moral issues of his time. His goal will not only be individual piety but “social holiness” (Wesley).

³⁸ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Crisis of Piety: Essays Towards a Theology of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 30-31.

➡ Day 1: Morning Office ◀

Silence and Centering

I am the true vine. (John 15:1)

Reflection: Donald Bloesch wrote *The Crisis of Piety* 40 years ago, but it’s a message the Evangelical church today still needs to hear. Were you challenged by this excerpt from Bloesch?

Reading:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus

*answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."
"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."
(John 13:1-17)*

Reflection – Jesus gave us an example to follow. Whose “feet” can you wash today? What can you do? *Be specific.*

Hymn: Make Me a Servant Kelly Willard (1982)
Make me a servant,
Humble and meek.
Lord, let me lift up
Those who are weak;

And may the prayer
Of my heart always be.
Make me a servant.
Make me a servant.
Make me a servant today.

Prayer – as you pray, ask God to show you how to wash other’s feet in your family, in your workplace, and in your ministry.

☞ Day 1: Midday Office ☞

Readings:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mark 6:34)

I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. (Mark 8:2)

*As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."
(Luke 7:12-13)*

☞ Day 1: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

I am the good shepherd. (John 10:11)

Reading:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

Reflection: Think of what you were when God called you to Christ. Now try to imagine what your life would be like had God not called you. Write down your thoughts.

Prayer of Examen

☞ Day 2: Morning Office ☞

Devotional Reading: *The Cantic of Brother Sun* by St. Francis of Assisi:³⁹

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
 and no man is worthy to mention your name.
Praise be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
 especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
 and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
 in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through
 the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through
 which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
 which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praise be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
 through whom You light the night
 and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
 who sustains and governs us and who produces varied fruits

³⁹ Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Writings*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady (New York: Paulist, 1982), 38-39.

with colored flowers and herbs.
 Praised be You, My Lord, through those who give pardon for
 Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation.
 Blessed are those who endure in peace
 for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
 Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
 for whom no living man can escape.
 Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
 Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
 for the second death shall do them no harm.
 Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him
 with great humility.

Exercise:

Francis was known for his ability to see and hear God in the creation around him. Take a few minutes this morning to sit outside in a beautiful place and do what Francis did: Delight in the beauty of God's creation. Think about how God cares for the plants and the animals and how well planned and complex his creation. Bring your Bible and read from the Psalms.

Alternative Exercise:

If you cannot go outside, put on a praise CD and spend this time in worship. Take time to read reflectively from the Psalms.

☞ Day 2: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
 (John 15:12)*

Prayer: As an expression of your love for others, pray for them now.

☞ Day 2: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

I am the way and the truth and the life. (John 14:6)

Reading:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14)

Prayer of Examen:

Scan the day that has just passed:

1. **Give thanks** – no matter how hard and troubling your day has been, there were moments of grace if you have

the eyes to see them. It may be nothing more than the air you breathe or the clothes you wear.

2. **Confess** – recall again your day, this time be alert to those times you failed to live up to God's calling. Use Rom 6:11-14 as a means of examining your life.

☞ Day 3: Morning Office ☞

Silence and Centering

Before Abraham was born, I am. (John 8:58)

Reading:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be

slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28-39)

Meditative Prayer – Paul reminds us that *all things*, including bad things, can happen to Christians but that God will cause those things to work together for our good, namely, that our lives will be conformed to the likeness of his Son. Re-read this passage slowly, pausing to give God thanks and praise for truths that stir your heart. Use this passage to help you pray for those who are experiencing *bad things* in their life today.

Hymn: We Will Glorify Twila Paris (2000)

We will glorify the King of Kings,
We will glorify the Lamb
We will glorify the Lord of Lords,
Who is the great I AM

Lord Jehovah reigns in majesty
We will bow before His throne
We will worship Him in righteousness
We will worship Him alone.
Hallelujah to the King of Kings,
Hallelujah to the Lamb
Hallelujah to the Lord of Lords,
Who is the great I AM

Exercise – call someone today who is going through a difficult time and encourage them.

☞ Day 3: Midday Office ☞

Reading:

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:26-27)

Prayer – Pray that James statement about acceptable religion would become more of a reality in your life and in the life of your church.

☞ Day 3: Evening Office ☞

Silence and Centering

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15)

Reading:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives

as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:13-21)

Reflection: Consider the costliness of Christ's sacrifice. How does that help you in your struggle against sin?

Journaling Exercise: Think back over your spiritual journey for the past three months and journal about your experience. What was spiritually beneficial about this experience? What was difficult? In what ways did God transform you?

[illegible]

- Develop a plan for how and when you will pray.
- Choose a devotional Bible reading plan, such as *A Guide to Prayer for all God's People*, *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle (3 volumes), *the Book of Common Prayer* (all available at amazon.com), etc.
- Plan a weekly fast of one meal, a quarterly fast of 24 hours, and a yearly fast of 36 hours or more.
- Get serious about keeping Sabbath every week. If you are married, discuss this with your spouse and children.
- Plan personal mini-retreats: Set aside ½ day each month, one full day every year, and an overnight retreat once every three years for prayer, silence and solitude.
- Participate in a ministry of compassion, such as a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter at least once a year.
- Each year, read one of the devotional classics. For ex:

Augustine of Hippo (4th to 5th centuries): *The Confessions*
 Baillie, John (20th century): *A Diary of Private Prayer*
 Benedict of Nursia (6th century): *The Rule of St. Benedict*
 Bernard of Clairvaux (12th century): *On the Love of God*
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (20th century): *The Cost of Discipleship*
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (20th century): *Life Together*

Brother Lawrence (17th century): *The Practice of the Presence of God*
 Bunyan, John (17th century): *The Pilgrim's Progress*
 Chambers, Oswald (19th to 20th centuries): *My Utmost for His Highest*
 de Sales, Francis (16th to 17th centuries): *Introduction to the Devout Life*
 de Sales, Francis (16th to 17th centuries): *On the Love of God*
 Fenelon, Francis (17th century): *Meditations on the Heart of God*
 Fenelon, Francis (17th century): *Let Go*
 Fox, George (17th century): *The Journal of George Fox*
 Guyon, Jeanne (17th century): *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*
 Ignatius of Loyola (16th century): *The Spiritual Exercises*
 John of the Cross (16th century): *The Dark Night of the Soul*
 Kempis, Thomas a (15th century): *The Imitation of Christ*
 Lewis, C.S. (20th century): *Mere Christianity*
 Lewis, C.S. (20th century): *Reflections on the Psalms*
 Merton, Thomas (20th century): *New Seeds of Contemplation*
 Nouwen, Henri J.M. (20th century): *In the Name of Jesus*
 Nouwen, Henri J.M. (20th century): *The Way of the Heart*
 Packer, J.I. (20th century): *Knowing God*
 Pascal, Blaise (17th century): *Pensees*
 Schaeffer, Francis A. (20th century): *True Spirituality*
 Teresa of Avila (16th century): *The Interior Castle*
 Tozer, A.W. (20th century): *The Knowledge of the Holy*

- Read a book about the spiritual disciplines, such as,

The Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard
Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald Whitney and Grover Gardener
The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People by John Ortberg

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APPENDIX 6

SERMON SERIES

Don't Do Anything, Just Sit There!

Luke 10:38-42

Each year contestants from as far away as Argentina and Zimbabwe convene in a sports arena in New York Mills, Minnesota. **Population – 972.**

They're not there to compete on the American Gladiators or My Dad's Better than Your Dad. They're there to think.

The Great American Think-Off is a national philosophy competition providing an opportunity for ordinary people to voice their opinions on some of life's more perplexing questions. College professors need not apply. This battle calls upon everyday folks – *a turkey farmer from NC, a baton-twirling instructor from Oklahoma, little league coach from Missouri* – to wrestle with the heavyweight questions of life and come to a convincing conclusion.

What are these big questions? From website: *is the nature of humanity inherently good or inherently evil? Which is more dangerous – science or religion? Does life have meaning?* It took an uneducated fisherman in **1993** to assure us that indeed it does.

Similarly, the Bible poses many great and direct questions. *What must we do to inherit eternal life? Who is my neighbor? If a man dies, will he live again? Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*

But other times, the bible poses the quest more subtly, like the question implied by today's text.¹

In **Lk 10:38-42**, we are challenged by a remark that Jesus made to his friend Martha during a visit to her home. In **Lk 10**, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem for the last time. To get there, they pass through the village of Bethany, a suburb about 2 miles east of Jerusalem. When Martha hears that Jesus and his disciples have hit town, she insists they come to her home for dinner. She wants to show them through her hospitality how much she loves them.

I give her credit for undertaking this task. You see, it's always a bit of a threat, I think, for a woman to have a preacher in her home for dinner. So to have 13 of them in sitting in your living room... **[Explain possibility that it was only Jesus in the house].** And Martha being the kind of person she is, will do her best to rise to the challenge. But as you can tell from the account, it wasn't going very well. If you've ever tried to prepare a big meal for a large gathering you can understand her frustration.

¹ This illustration was adapted from www.homiletics.com

(III) I read of a mom who refers to the dinner hour in her home as **Arsenic Hour**. That's when she either wants to give arsenic or take arsenic because of the pandemonium of preparing dinner, completing homework and changing diapers. I suspect Martha is feeling the same way.

I imagine that Martha's in over head. In her frenzy, I imagine that she burned the bread and dropped the salad bowl and now cherry tomatoes are rolling all over the dusty floor. You can't serve dusty tomatoes to the Master!

She needed help. And when she looked around for the one person who could help her – her sister Mary – there she was, sitting on the floor at the feet of Jesus...and with all those men!!!

“How dare she?!?” When she could take it no longer, she slammed down her apron, stormed into the living room, made her way to Jesus, and scolded him, *“Lord, don't you care that I have to prepare this entire meal by myself? Tell Mary to get into the kitchen and help me.”* Martha was as peeved at Jesus (can we say that in a Baptist church) for letting Mary sit there as she was at Mary for not helping out in the kitchen.

Does any of this surprise you? Does it surprise you that she doesn't just tiptoe up to Mary and whisper in her ear, *“Mary, can you come in and give me a hand?”* but goes straight to Jesus? Martha's irritated and when you're irritated and your emotions are in control, you tend not to care about people's feelings. How many times have small children been on the receiving end of an angry parent's tirade simply because mom or dad was irritated about an unrelated matter? Her reaction is not all that surprising, at least not to me.

And I'm sure Martha thought that Jesus would see the wisdom of her argument and send Mary scurrying back into the kitchen to do her duty.

Instead, Jesus tenderly said to her *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen what is better.”*

You don't have to go to seminary to understand this story. It's clear that Martha made the bad choice and Mary made the good choice. It's not Mary who's rebuked. It's Martha! The worker. The servant. Mary made the right choice to stop and sit and learn.

But please don't assume that Mary did nothing to help Martha. I'm sure she had been helping Martha in the kitchen before their guests arrived. I'm sure she swept the porch, kneaded the bread and stoked the fire. But when Jesus arrived she left the cooking and joined those who were absorbed with Jesus and his teaching. Mary eagerly sat down to learn at his feet – the very feet she would soon anoint with expensive perfume. Devoted to God, Mary was doing the very thing Jesus had commanded in the Sermon on the Mount: *she was seeking 1st his kingdom and his righteous before all else*

This also constitutes Christian service. Charles Spurgeon says about Mary: *“for though Mary was not apparently engaged in waiting upon X as Martha was, yet she was, in very*

truth, ministering unto him in a deeper and truer sense. No one gives greater joy to a public speaker than an attentive listener; no one serves a teacher better than he who is an apt and attentive scholar. The 1st duty, indeed, of the student to the tutor is that he be cheerful in accepting, and diligent in retaining, what is taught: in this sense, Mary was really waiting upon X in one of his loftiest capacities, namely—that of a teacher and prophet in the midst of Israel.”

That brings us to our **great think-off question**: *Is it better to be a Mary or a Martha?*

If Martha is understood as a type of active Christian, the Christian at work in the church, in the community and in the world, and if Mary is seen as a type of contemplative Christian, a bit withdrawn from the world in a quest for prayer and contemplation, like the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries who went into the desert to devote themselves to contemplation, the pursuit of God, the question becomes a discussion of the relative merits of active service verses quiet devotion.

But that’s really a false dichotomy, because Martha’s not being faulted for her service. What is more, the previous story in Luke is *the story of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus applauds the merits of being a good neighbor. If someone’s in need and you’re in a position to meet that need, you’re expected to do it. Martha’s just being a neighbor.* Even Paul says in **Eph 2:10** *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Martha’s not faulted for her service.

Martha is just trying to be a neighbor to Jesus and his disciples. She knows they’ve been on the road for some time and they’re hungry and tired. Men are hungry even when they’re not on the road. She wants to meet their need. And if you’re going to prepare a meal for 16 people, sitting around some feet, even the beautiful feet of Jesus, won’t get the food prepared.

That’s the kind of person Martha was. Acts of kindness fell from her life like butter from a warm knife. Martha was the kind of person who would sit by a sick child to give a tired mother some needed rest. If a missionary was in town, Martha would open her home and turn it into a 5-star hotel, not some Econo Lodge. Martha is being a neighbor to Jesus. That’s not why she’s faulted. In this way, she’s a model.

The real issue here is one of balance. Mary had it; Martha did not. Jesus is not giving Martha low marks for serving.

Jesus seems to be putting his finger on two problems.

The 1st difficulty Jesus points out was not the service but the spirit of the service. Luke says in **vs 40** that Martha was distracted (*lit overburdened*) by all her preparations. She was overly concerned with doing everything **“just right”** for her honored guests. Martha’s philosophy seems to have been that if a thing’s worth doing, it’s worth doing in a spectacular fashion.

Martha's not just preparing a meal. It's a feast. **Why?** Well, maybe *as Dr. Bruce Demarest of Denver seminary writes*, it's because she was seeking everyone's approval for a job well-done. To this spirit, Jesus says, "*Martha, Martha, only one thing is needed. One dish would've sufficed.*" The lesson Jesus offers Martha, and us, is that sometimes, if a thing is worth doing, it may be worth doing simply.

Certainly it's good to show hospitality, but if your spirit is hurt because of your many preparations, you need to know that soup and sandwiches will suffice.

If you're doing ministry to the homeless, and the best you can do is blankets and sandwiches, that's enough. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan used what he had to help that man. He patched him up, took him to a hospital and paid the bill. He did what he could. And that's the meaning of *simplicity*.

Simplifying your life, your ministry, can be a very important strategy.

Now don't misunderstand this. This is not a plea for laziness. There are times when you have to put your best foot forward. If you can prepare a 7-course meal and do it with great delight and warm hospitality and for the glory of God, than I'm coming to your house. **[Tell story of past Super Bowl Parties at Tony's house]**. But if you're present way of doing things is making you irritable and miserable, it's time to simplify a bit.

But that's not the end of it. There's another lesson here, a more important lesson, a more significant problem, that Jesus identifies:

Why does Jesus say that Mary has chosen the better thing and that what she has chosen will not be taken from her → meaning that Jesus will not send her back into the kitchen?

What has Mary chosen? **To focus on Jesus and His ministry to her instead of her ministry to Him.**

Mary didn't turn away from Christian service and leave Martha to do all the work so she could go to a tanning salon, update her facebook account, watch soap operas or play internet bingo. **Mary simplified her life so that she would have time to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word and allow Jesus to minister to her.**

Mary understood that one of the great blessings of our salvation, the one we are most prone to take for granted, is that Jesus died on the cross to pay our debt to infinite justice **not just** to rescue us from eternal darkness, but to make us His friends so that we can enjoy communion with God and reestablish the fellowship with God that was broken in the Garden of Eden. What was the most delightful aspect of the Garden of Eden? Not tomatoes that were the size of beach balls, or wrestling with lion cubs, but the late afternoon when God came to visit them in the Garden in the cool of the day. That's what Jesus re-established at Calvary.

What's the lesson? It's vital to our spiritual and emotional health to allow Jesus to serve us before we serve others. Mary got it right and received Jesus' approval because being intimate with the Savior is more important than getting the potatoes cooked just right or the napkins folded so they looked like a replica of the temple!

So at the end of the day, it is better to be Mary. Why? Because a ministry to our spirit must precede a ministry to others. Before we become involved in service to others, or as we are involved in service to others, we must allow Jesus Christ to serve us, to fill us, to feed us, to nurture us.

I love what JC Ryle wrote: *"what a snare to our souls the cares of this world may be, if allowed to take up too much attention."* Martha was so carried away by her ministry that she forgot, for a time, the things of her soul. Not Mary. Mary served, she served simply, then she tended to the things of her soul.

Both of these gals loved Jesus. Martha showed it in her service; Mary showed it by her posture. It was Mary's love for the Savior that made her a willing learner, and we must be the same.

Mary is the model, even though for most of us, Martha is the reality. According to a USA Today article a few yrs ago, we are a nation of stressed-out strivers. Did you know that Americans work an extra month each year compared with just 20 yrs ago and that a majority of adults suffer an hour or more per day of sleep deprivation?

Ask a typical Christian how she's doing and you're likely to hear, *"I'm so busy. My life is crazy."* Even if they're not busy, they'll say they're busy because busyness is seen as a virtue today.

We distort the maxim **"I think, therefore I am"** to read **"I work hard, therefore I am."** We drive ourselves relentlessly. That spirit has even invaded the church. I recently read about a church in Florida that advertises, **"Express Worship, 45 Minutes, Guaranteed."** The pastor says, *"It's an opportunity for people in church who are running in the fast lane but still love the Lord."*

Why do we do this to ourselves? Sometimes it's because we don't know how to draw boundaries. Sometimes it's because we derive a sense of significance when people know that we're busy. That's why we tell people that we are busy even if we're not. Sometimes it's because we don't want to face up to our real selves and the haunting emptiness within.

Martha was so encumbered about her serving that she neglected the better part, to sit at the feet of Jesus, to listen, to learn, to enjoy.

Martha stands as a stark warning to all Christians. If we desire to grow in grace, and to enjoy soul-prosperity, and to have a lasting and fruitful ministry, it's not the open breach of God's commandments that ought to worry us, but excessive attention to things that are

good and lawful and even necessary **to the exclusion** of caring for our souls. **Ryle says,** *“our families, our business, our daily callings, our household affairs, our interaction with society, all, all may become snares to our hearts, and may draw us away from God. We may go down to the pit of hell from the very midst of lawful things.”*

(III) A sign in a Christian bookstore read, ***“Satan doesn’t need very many demons to torment Americans. He has day-timers and calendars.”***

Chuck Swindoll somewhere said, *“busyness rapes relationship. It substitutes shallow frenzy for deep friendship. It feeds the ego but stresses the inner being. It fills a calendar but fractures a family.*

And not only that, but it creates a disconnect with God. It renders God a haunting stranger. The hurried and harried soul soon discovers that God’s gracious visitations become all too rare.

Jesus’ life was never controlled by a clock or by circumstances. We never find Jesus rushing to a celebration at Cana or running a red light to get to church on time. His inner manner was always measured and collected. Jesus served with a calmness and composure rooted in communion with the heavenly Father.

Jesus constantly sought solitude from the crowd, from the time of his baptism up to the Garden of Gethsemane. **Why?** He was honoring a deep, spiritual need for a time dedicated not to accomplishment and ministry, but to quiet communion with His Father.

And even though there were still lepers to heal, blind that need to see, and hungry to be fed, Jesus took time to come apart from the crowds, to rest and to commune with God.

It is only by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and beholding him, that we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. Charles Spurgeon describes our relationship to Christ with his typical eloquence: *“To sit at Jesus’ feet in humble submission and quiet rest, he the master and I the little child, I the vessel waiting to be filled and he my fullness, I the mown grass and he the falling dew, the rain drop and he the sun that makes me glisten in life with diamond brilliance.”*

Why is Mary the model?

- Because sitting at Jesus’ feet means **peace**, for they who submit to Jesus find peace thru his precious blood and thru his life-giving Spirit.
- It means **holiness**, for those who sit at Jesus’ feet will behold true holiness and will be instructed in things that are good and lovely and pure.
- It means **strength**, for those who sit at Jesus’ feet are girded with His strength and power and courage and confidence.

- It means **zeal**, for those who sit at Jesus' feet will be filled with the fire of X's spirit, a fire that gave Jesus a zeal for the Lord's house.
- And it means **missions**, for those who sit at Jesus' feet will begin to pulsate with His love for the lost, the broken, and the marginalized. For what reason did Jesus come from heaven to earth? He came to give his life a ransom for many so that men and women might repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith and be rescued from an eternity of sorrow and gloom in a land where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and eternal darkness and utter despair. A passion for missions and evangelism comes to those who sit at the feet of Jesus.

Beloved of God, Christ did not bring you to himself to make a slave or a ministry-machine. He brought you to himself to make you his friend. The Sovereign Majesty of the universe enjoys having fellowship with us. Mary chose the good part because that's what Jesus wanted when he came to their home that evening.

To answer the think-off question: ***"Is it better to be a Mary or a Martha,"*** one would think we'd have to side with the world's greatest thinker when he said, ***"it's Mary."***

Living Illustration: We're going to spend the next several weeks exploring the different ways we can sit at the feet of Jesus and nurture our souls. Today I've invited Marya Pier to share with you how she does this in her life.

Disciplines of Grace
Shaping Our Souls in Silence and Solitude
I Corinthians 9:24-27, Mark 1:21-29

(III) You've just been invited to compete in the Beijing Games! The US Olympic Committee believes that you have the right body type to be successful in the marathon. But you're in no shape to run a marathon. You couldn't even run to the supermarket. **Expand...**

If you're serious about seizing this chance of a lifetime, you'll have to enter into a life of training. You'll have to arrange your life around certain practices that will enable you to do what you cannot do by willpower alone. You'll need to live a disciplined life. If you want to win, if you want to compete, if you want finish, training, not willpower, is required.

Now this need for training is not confined only to athletics. It's required for any significant challenge in life – **music, martial arts, and in our case, spiritual growth.**

Spiritual growth, spiritual transformation, victorious and efficient Christian living, is not a matter of trying hard, but of training wisely. It's not a matter of willpower or determination or positive thinking. It takes discipline. This is the thought behind Paul's advice to the church in Corinth: "*everyone who competes in the games goes into **strict training**. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*"

And his audience knows precisely what he's talking about: Corinth had hosted the Isthmian games for centuries. They were also well aware of the Olympic Games. And he reminds them that in these games, though many participate, only one will get the prize. Only one gold medal per event. Only one 1st place winner. And the athlete who lives a disciplined life and who trains hard, stands the best chance of winning.

Paul likens the Christian life to those games. It's not that there's only one winner. If you're on the Christian team, you'll cross the line. You'll receive the crown of righteous, the glory. But if you want your life to be about more than just receiving a crown at the end, if you want to live well and become godly and experience Christ's presence and have a tenacious faith that equips you to say 'no' to sin consistently and frequently, then you'll have to enter into a life of training and discipline.

The same thought lies behind his counsel to Timothy in **I Tim 4:7** "*Train yourself to be godly.*"

In *The Sacred Way*, Tony Jones writes, "If there's a common theme among the writers of scripture and the great Christian writers throughout the centuries, it's this: ***Seeking God is never easy. Running strong and finishing well is never easy.*** The history of the Christian church is the story of many faithful Christians admirably fighting back their own sins, striving to mortify their fleshly lusts, living in the power of the HS, enjoying

intimacy with Christ and putting on holiness as a garb by living disciplined lives and practicing certain activities.”

Now the traditional term for such activities is “**spiritual disciplines**.” Many of you are familiar with this term. It’s one of our 6 core values: *intimacy with Christ through the practice of the spiritual disciplines*.

- **Richard Foster** wrote the classic work on this subject called *The Celebration of Disc*. in which he describes 12 such activities.
- **Dallas Willard** identifies 15 disciplines in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

Spiritual disciplines are activities such as *solitude, prayer, meditation, fasting, simplicity, study, keeping Sabbath, service* that help us **gain power** to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it.

They are those tried and true practices that are explained in scripture and have been practiced by every wing of the Christian church throughout its history that raise the level of our lives towards godliness by positioning us to receive God’s grace, by positioning us to receive God’s grace.

The late Henri Nouwen (Dutch Catholic priest) describes them like this: *In the spiritual life, the word “discipline” means “the effort to create some space in which God can act.*

You see, spiritual growth is not something that happens automatically. We must cooperate with grace. **Ph 2:12-13** “*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to **work out** your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*” **Cooperation.**

Paul tells Timothy that the good servant of JC deliberately trains with a view to the cultivation of godliness. He says ‘**work out for godliness.**’ He’s telling us to discipline ourselves that we might live the Christian life. Discipline does not make the Christian life *easy*, but it does make it *easier*.

(III) A few weeks ago, I watched the movie *Miracle* – the story of the 1980 US Olympic Hockey team that stunned the world by defeating a vastly superior Russian team in the medal round. As I watched, I could remember sitting in my bedroom as a teenager watching that game and feeling the excitement. It was David and Goliath. But I what I didn’t realize until I saw the movie was the reason those college kids were able to defeat a bigger, faster, more experienced Russian team. They trained hard. They practiced drills until they were physically depleted and almost vomiting on the ice. The training didn’t make the game easy. But it made it easier.

That’s what Paul is saying to us: Discipline doesn’t make the Christian life easy, but it makes it easier.

- That Christian woman who's struggling with a husband who is mean, who is unkind to her, she disciplines herself for the purpose of godliness **in prayer, in the word, in meditation upon the word, in attending the means of grace.** And when she's prepared a beautiful dinner, and he comes home and he's once again mean to her, it's not that it's easy for her to respond in a Christian way, but it's ***easier*** because she's been disciplining herself for the purpose of godliness.
- That man who's been wrestling against lust, against pornography, who's been trying to carefully guard what he looks at and what he reads and what company he keeps and how he is when he's away from home—when he's in that airport, when he's in that hotel room and the temptation comes and a woman makes an advance ***and he walks away or he doesn't order the pay-per-view pornography***—it's not that it's ***easy*** for him to do that, but it's ***easier*** because he had been praying. He had been accountable. He had been under the means of grace. He'd been reading his Bible, he'd been praying for God to give him strength. He'd been disciplining himself so that he could be godly when the challenge came.

And that's how it is. Prayer, meditation, fasting, solitude, cultivating spiritual friendships, attending to the means of grace: these things prepare us for the living of the Christian life.

Now one of the problems with modern Christianity is that we tend to believe that head knowledge is how one becomes more adept at following Christ. The more you know, the more you study, the more sermons you listen to, the better you'll do. But that doesn't always translate into a godly, humble, zealous, Spirit-filled life. There are many stories about people who've graduated from seminary with a head full of knowledge and a heart full of sin and whole mess of spiritual immaturity.

- They've learned a lot of theology.
- They've learned much about culture and ministry.
- They've learned how to plan a worship service.
- They've learned how to parse Greek verbs.
- They can share the gospel of Christ with a Muslim and a Mormon with one arm tied behind their back.
- But whether it's that they're living lives of quiet desperation or in secret sin, the fact remains: *head knowledge alone does not make you adept at following Christ.*

(III) Listen to these laments recorded in Bruce Demarest's book "***Soul Guide***" (professor at Denver Seminary)

I've been a Christian and attended church for many yrs. But I have no idea what it means to have a relationship with Jesus. God is someone I pray to at night b/t the sheets when I'm in trouble.

A seminarian with overseas mission experience laments: *I have neglected the care and nurture of my soul. I'm on a sinking ship. Water is pouring into my vessel.*

One minister confessed: *I would quit tomorrow if it wouldn't screw up my retirement.*

To help counteract such laments, the bible commends to us the disciplined life.

Run in such a way; train yourself.

True transformation happens only when we attend to the means of grace, these spiritual disciplines, that lie at the heart of faith. They won't make the Christian life easy, but they will make it easier.

So for the next few weeks, we're going to look at some disciplines that we can practice, some habits that we can develop, that will energize us, that will be like fuel for the soul. When we practice them consistently, our spiritual life goes into overdrive.

A word of caution before we start: *Set reasonable goals. Take baby steps.*

It would be very unwise for you after service today to draw up an aggressive plan for spiritual advancement that immediately incorporates all 12 disciplines. Within a few weeks, you'll feel so overwhelmed and exhausted that you'll give up the whole project as something practical *for monks, super-saints and Baptist pastors*. This is not meant to be law. This is not meant to be a spiritual barometer. Your task is not to calculate how many verses of scripture you've memorized **or** how many minutes you've spent in prayer. Your task is to use these activities to create space for God to work. This is a way for you to put up your sails and catch the Spirit's wind. This is a way for you to grow in grace and experience the transforming presence of God.

Today we're going to talk about 2 of the most overlooked disciplines: ***silence and solitude.***

Henri Nouwen said, "*Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.*" Still we try. We've become addicted to noise. **Our lives are punctuated by noise and all things WiFi.**

Every minute of every day, we're surrounded by noise. You wake up to the radio. You take a shower with the radio. You prepare breakfast with the radio. When you go out of the house, you've got some device plugged into your head. You get in your car, on goes the radio. You eat lunch in a noisy cafeteria. You work with music playing. Throughout the day, your cell phone is ringing. You go to the gym and music is blaring thru the speakers. When you come home at the end of the day, you turn on the TV, even if you're not watching. We sit down to eat and IM's are bleeping through our computer speakers. We go to sleep with the TV still on. And if you're married with children...forget about it. Our lives are punctuated by noise.

(ILL) Nielsen reports that TVs are turned on an avg of **6 hrs/day**. Therapist Dolores Curren asked a family to write down the phrases most heard around the house during a 2-week period. The 2 chart-toppers stunned the family: ***"what's on?" and "move!"***

And you see the worst thing about TV is **NOT** what it puts in our minds but what it keeps us from doing. It kills intimacy and conversation; it disrupts sustained thought; and it robs us of moments of solitude with God. We're busy enough. The TV doesn't help. Nor do PC and laptops.

Now contrast that with the great leaders of the Bible. Every great leader of the Bible was familiar with solitude. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, John, and on and on—these individuals knew the **power of solitude because they experienced the power of solitude**. Some times God thrust them into solitude, into the wilderness and other times they structured it into their schedules.

What does **Heb 13:7**? *“Remember your leaders...consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”* These men and women are exemplary in their practice of solitude.

There are several references to Jesus doing this. One that comes to mind is **Lk 5:16** *“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”* **OFTEN. ALONE. SOLITUDE.**

You say, *“but pastor that’s impossible for me. I have a noisy job, noisy kids, a noisy spouse, and I live in a noisy neighborhood —peace and quiet are luxuries I can’t afford.”* The truth is that we all have a hectic lifestyle. The more hectic our lives, the more essential it is that we make space for silence and solitude. The benefits are worth the effort.

Now most people today are busy. I suspect that most of you have a daily planner to keep track of your responsibilities. And if you're a married man, I'm sure there's a honey-do list posted somewhere in your house (*honey do this, honey do that*). Ever wonder what was in Jesus' PDA? Ever wonder what a typical day in the life of Jesus looked like?

If you have your Bible, turn to **Mark 1:21-26, 29-34**.
Follow along as I read this journal entry.

What strikes me about this is that we're not the 1st people on the planet to have busy lives. **Look at this day:**

- Walk miles to Capernaum
- go into the synagogue to preach and teach
- after the sermon, heal a demon-possessed man
- head to Simon's house for coffee and cake after service
- before the 1st bite of pecan pie, minister to Simon's mother-in-law
- then sit down to your meal while answering questions about what just happened
- doorbell rings; open the door to find a crowd of sick and demon-possessed people; heal most
- when the last one leaves, answer questions from the disciples

But before nodding off for the night, Jesus does something that's not recorded - sets the alarm. **Why? Look at vs 35**

Now Simon and the gang don't get it. After they wake up and have breakfast, they go hunting for Jesus. And when they find him, they're **shocked** that he's gone off to be alone. **See vs 37.**

"What are you doing here all by yourself? There's work to be done. People are looking for you."

Though it's not spoken, the implication is that Jesus is wasting valuable time in solitude.

It would've been very easy for Jesus to stay in bed an extra hour. He must've been exhausted. It would've been even easier for Jesus to delete the AM prayer appointment he'd made with God. After all, there's work to be done. Maybe tomorrow. Or next week. Or when crowds die down.

Yet there it is – *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."*

Jesus was practicing the spiritual discipline of solitude - of learning to put aside the to-do list and go to simply **be with** the Lord. Together. Just the Father and Jesus. Just them. Together. Alone. No one to teach or heal. He wasn't out to **DO** anything, or was He?

What happens after Jesus pauses to make this inward journey? **Look at vs 38-39.** He goes back out into the world with clear purpose and vision to the work God had sent him to do.

Mark reveals Jesus doing what any good disciple needs to do – pray, spend time alone with God, receive guidance and strength from his word. God speaks to us in solitude. His Word becomes clear and vivid and precise in solitude. His Spirit ministers to our spirit in solitude. His will comes into sharper focus in solitude. Our faults and sins become crystal clear in solitude.

Perhaps the reason we can't hear His voice and sense His presence and discern his guidance is because we never turn down the volume. Some people read scripture while listening to an I-Pod **or** with music playing in the background **or** in front of their computer with emails and IMs popping up from time to time. If God does speak to us with that small, gentle voice, as he did with Elijah, it requires solitude to hear it. This was no acted parable. Jesus needed that quiet communion with God. Mark records it again in **Mk 6:46** and again in **Mk 14:32**

And what He practiced, He encouraged in others. We saw that last week. Martha the ever-faithful hostess - baking and serving. Aching feet. Dishpan hands. Mary quietly sitting by Jesus. Not doing. Just being. Just listening. Just enjoying. Just contemplating

His words. Basking in the love of God. **And it's Mary, not Martha, who gets the high marks.**

He often said to his disciples, "*come away to a deserted place.*" He says that still. Wise followers of X's way have always understood the necessity and benefit of solitude.

Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that relentlessly molest us and mold us. But there's more to it than that.

Ps 46:10-11 "*Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*" "***Be still, and know that I am God.***"

What more ultimate thing could there be to know? What more perfect knowledge could we have than to know that God is God? The Scripture promises that knowledge if we are still in front of him.

Ultimately we keep silence and solitude so we can listen better – so we can hear what God is saying to us. That's why when you go to that solitary place, you bring your bible, particularly the Psalms.

(III) It's like being on the phone with a friend who has something important to tell me. I'll move out of the noisy room where the TV is on and the kids are playing and the vacuum is running and shut myself in a closet so I can really hear what my friend is saying. That's the kind of attentive listening that silence and solitude engender.

Is 30:15 *This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, **in quietness and trust is your strength**, but you would have none of it."*

It takes real discipline to stop. It takes real discipline to clear the agenda. It takes real discipline to get away from the crowd, especially if you're a person who derives energy from being with people. It takes real discipline to turn off the Ipad or the computer or the cell phone. It takes real discipline to make time simply to **BE** with the Lord and to **DO** nthg else. That's why we refer to solitude as a spiritual discipline. It's essential to our souls.

King David wrote: *But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Ps 131:2)* **What a picture!** A child at rest with its mother—it's the picture of peace, contentment and security. This describes our relationship with God when we take the time to be still and quiet before him.

Today I want to suggest some ways to implement this habit into your lifestyle.

First, find time to be alone. Even in your busy schedule, you can squeeze out moments of solitude here and there. Schedule it or it won't happen. Maybe you can get up a few minutes before everyone else **or** stay up a few minutes later than everyone else. (*if you have teenagers, getting up first is a lot easier than going to bed last; if you have small*

children, stay up later). Or maybe you have time alone on the way to and from work. Or maybe you can have lunch alone twice/week. Not every day, since we are called to be the light of the world. Or maybe you can slip into an empty room in the evening when everyone else is watching TV. With some effort, you can make time to be alone with your heavenly Father.

The first thing that we need to do when we get alone with God is **STOP**. Just stop. Be still for a moment. Settle down. Wait. David wrote: *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

There have been times when I’ve had so many things on my to-do list in a given day that I hit my devotional time at 90 miles per hour. Like a mighty wind, I’ve blown through the process and then I marked it off my list and moved on to the next thing.

Throughout the centuries, Christians have used a prayer called **The Jesus Prayer** to center themselves and quiet the voices within. It goes like this: *“Lord Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”* Repeating that a few times helps to focus your heart. It’s not a mantra to manipulate God to answer you. It’s for you to be able to do what Paul said in **Col 3:1** *“set your heart on things above where X is seated at the right hand of God”*

When you get alone with God, stop. Wait. Be still. And whether you have 5 minutes or 30 minutes at a time or a few hours, the process is the same. Get alone with God and be still. Forget about everything but him. Let him begin to bring peace to your harried soul.

The second step of this process is to make it as quiet as possible. When it comes to seeking God, the less noise, the better. In the quiet you will begin to hear the still, small voice of God.

The third step in this process is silence. **Quiet** refers to what you hear; **silence** refers to what you say—or, rather, what you don’t say. Most of us think that prayer consists only of talking to God, but there’s more to it than that. A very powerful part of our prayer life is the part we spend in silence, listening. In our silence, God is able to break through to us and change us and speak into our lives and bring to our minds scripture that we’ve hidden away in the recesses of our hearts.

In Ps 62 David wrote: *“My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation.”*

And finally, when you’re in solitude, prayerfully read the scriptures and pray for others.

Concl: There’s something about being alone that has the ability to renew us, to invigorate us and to energize us. But I want to make it clear that it’s not just about being all by yourself. It’s about being alone *with God*, and being quiet so that we can *hear him speak*.

There’s no formula on how to do this. You learn to do it just by doing it.

I know people who take a week off every year and spend time alone in a retreat center in absolute silence and solitude. I hope to do that once before I die. But much more important is the habit of doing it daily for 5, 10, or even 15 minutes at a time. As the habit develops, you can try to spend an hour or two once/week. And when you get really good, take ½ day once per month or once/quarter.

And when you get there, be as still as you can be, make it as quiet as it can be, be as silent as you can be, and listen to the still, small voice of God. You'll find that it is fuel for your soul.

Living Illustration – Tony Iliakostas, Jr.

Disciplines of Grace
Meditation
Psalm 1

We're in the midst of a series on spiritual formation, spiritual transformation. And we're looking at those processes, those disciplines, those means of grace that will bring it about, that will enable us to live supernaturally changed lives.

Ph 2:12 -- *Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* Not “*work for your salvation.*” You can only work something out if you already have it. Work out our salvation. What does that mean? It means we are to take the grace that we've received when we united ourselves to Christ by faith and work it out in every dimension of our being: our relationships, our identity, our behavior, our life. Work it out. Grow. Mature. Be transformed. **What are the ways we can do that?** The same way believers have been doing it for centuries: **by practicing the spiritual disciplines that lie at the heart of our faith.**

Last week we looked at the disciplines of **silence and solitude**. And we saw how the souls of the great men and women in scripture, including Jesus, were shaped in the wilderness, in solitude, in solitary places. Now solitude is not simply about being alone, away from the crowds, away from the noise. What makes solitude transformative is what happens in solitude. **Mk 1:35, for ex, says,** “*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*” In solitude, Jesus prayed.

We looked at Elijah. It was in the wilderness, in solitude, that he heard the small, still voice of God speaking to him. In solitude we pray and we listen.

Today we're going to look at a discipline that draws those 2 things – prayer and listening – together. The discipline is described for us in the 1st Psalm, Psalm 1.

Now the central claim of **Ps 1** is easy to miss because the 1st sentence is rather long. Notice what it says: ***Blessed*** – what does that mean? Often translated ‘*happy*’. Meant more than that in Hebrew. ***Total fulfillment; or what I prefer, happiness that flows from complete well-being.***

Who does that come to? Vs 2: *Blessed is the person who has learned to meditate; blessed is the person who has learned to enjoy and meditate and feast on the Law of God*
What a promise!

Let's see what this passage teaches us about meditation, which is one of the disciplines of grace, one of the ways we work out our salvation.

I. The Promise (verse 3)

What is promised to a person who has learned this discipline is simply remarkable. **Vs. 3**

1. Substance

Two images are compared in this Psalm: **a tree and chaff**.

The person who meditates is like a tree rather than chaff. **Explain chaff.**

Compare a tree to chaff.

The person who has learned to meditate is like a tree rather than chaff. Think about that.

We've all known people who are chaff-like – shallow and superficial. They make great claims about themselves, but they lack depth; artificial; posers. **Movie: Wild Hogs**

- they like to be considered **confident** when they're really **scared**
- they want to be considered **cool** when they're really **kind of nerdy**
- they want to be considered **spiritual** when they're really **worldly**
- they want to be considered **pure and godly** when their hearts are really seething swamps of lust and greed
- they lack depth and substance; they're wishy-washy; easily influenced and swayed

Meditation, the Psalmist tells us, enables a person to become a tree → a person with depth, substance, solidity, convictions that cannot be easily swayed by the crowd. Such depth is promised to the person who meditates on God's Law.

2. Stability

The person who meditates is like a tree, but not just any tree → **he's like a tree near a stream. Explain the tree next to the stream. Constant supply of water to the roots.**

A tree like that can handle anything → the heat; a drought; when the hot winds are blowing and the rain isn't falling, and the other trees are losing their apples, this tree is flourishing; its leaves are always green; its fruit is still plump. That is what's promised to the person who has learned to meditate. Adverse circumstances will not destroy you. They will not rob your joy.

The person who has learned to meditate speaks like the prophet Habakkuk in **Habakkuk 3:17-18** *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls...**how terrible!!!!**... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."*

You have to put this in context. This is a farmer. But there are no figs on the fig tree, no grapes on the vine, no crops in the field, no sheep in the pen, no cattle in the stalls. It's Black Friday. The market has crashed. Future is uncertain. Every crutch has been kicked out from under him. But he's still praising God in the midst.

How can that be? When you meditate, you have access to the water that is there when all other waters dry up. When you learn to meditate, you won't be blown apart by circumstances.

This was certainly true of Jesus. His life was just saturated with scripture. **Heb 10:7** says *"Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'"* That's a reference to Jesus and it's taken from **Ps 40:6-8**. But the writer of Hebrews only quotes the 1st part of **vs 8**. **Let me read to you the whole verse.**

Ps 40:8 says *"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."* Jesus was saturated with scr. God's law, the scriptures, were in his heart. **"How did they get there?"** He meditated on them day and night, both as a boy growing up in a Jewish home, and then throughout his life. How do you think he quoted scripture so effortlessly? **"He was God, pastor, he wrote it for heaven's sake!"**

Understand something about the incarnation. When Jesus became a man, he laid aside the independent use of his deity and lived as a man, a Spirit-filled man, that He might represent all men on the cross and become **THE** example of what it means to love God and to love others and to resist temptation.

- He had to walk places like other men.
- He had to eat and sleep and rest like other men.
- When he was flogged, he felt the same pain you would feel if your flesh was shredded with sharp pieces of stone, metal and wood.
- And He had to learn scripture like other men.
- The reason he faced every joy, every challenge, and every temptation by quoting scripture is because from a very early age, he learned to meditate on it day/night.

He was so saturated in scripture that everything he did was simply an outworking of his meditation.

And that's what anchored him when the waters dried up and the lights went out.

- In wilderness, without food or water or the company of friends, Satan couldn't deter him from his mission because the scripture was in his heart.
- The criticisms and threats of his enemies could not deter him because his roots were sunk deep into the well of scripture.
- He was able to set his face towards Jerusalem and walk into that dark valley knowing the cost because he learned to meditate.
- And in his darkest moment –cross – when he was so thirsty that his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, when the lights of heaven grew dim, even then he's quoting scripture – **Ps 22**

When Paul said in **I Cor 11:1**, *"follow my example as I follow the example of Christ,"* this includes following their example of meditation because the person who learns to meditate will become a person of stability and single-mindedness no matter the circumstances.

3. Fruitfulness

What does *in season* mean? The Psalmist is saying that we're not always going to have endless seasons of fruitfulness. *This tree yields its fruit in season*, which means there will be seasons without fruit. Because it's planted by the stream, its leaves are always green and the tree is always strong because its roots are well-watered, but fruit is seasonal.

The Psalmist paints a very realistic picture of life, of the Christian life.

- there are up times and down times; times of fruitfulness and times of fruitlessness,
- at times, our branches will be barren; even Christians of substance and stability spend time in the spiritual wilderness, dark night of the soul stuff, shattered hopes and dreams, even needing to be pruned by the Father.
- but those down times are not permanent; the fruit will return; fruit is seasonal;
- What's the key to fruitfulness? Meditating on the Law of the Lord day and night.

Substance, stability, fruitfulness...all from this. So what is meditation?

II. The Principle – What is meditation?

The position of this Psalm tells us something about the nature of meditation.

Where is this Psalm located? It's the door to the entire Psalter. And the Psalms, for the most part, are prayers. The Psalter is the prayer book of the Bible. Historically, millions of Christians have gone to the Psalms to find words for the cry of their hearts in the worst of times and in the best of times.

But the 1st Psalm is not a prayer **or** an exhortation to pray or to praise. So why was it put here? Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan believes it was put here deliberately by the inspired *compiler* of the Psalms because it is the *preface* to the kind of prayer that will turn you into a rooted, growing, transformed, stable person.

Meditation is not only about how we handle the bible. Meditation is not only about delighting in the Word of God. Meditation and prayer are joined at the hip. For many Christians, our prayers tend to be intercessory. We pray for something **or** about something. "*God I need you. God I'm in trouble. God I'm sick.*" Fine. Such prayer is clearly commended in the bible.

But there's another kind of prayer and it's *called meditative prayer*. At the heart of *meditative prayer* is scripture.

Meditative prayer is prayer that **follows** my meditation upon scripture. It's prayer that responds to God. Some people refer to this as *praying the scripture*.

Meditation means I'm thinking about the Word of God. I'm immersing myself in the Word of God. That's Psalm 1. But then the rest of the Psalter is prayer. *Do you see the connection? As we ponder scripture deeply, it births prayer.*

As you meditate on scripture, you will hear God speaking. Why? Because when scripture speaks, God speaks. And because God doesn't yell, a quiet place is the ideal place to meditate.

As you meditate,

- when God says something about his greatness or majesty or plans and purposes, stop and praise him for that. That's meditative prayer.
- when God says something convicting and the Holy Spirit puts his thumb on something in your life that shouldn't be there, stop and confess that.
- when God says something exciting, stop and respond to that. Meditative prayer.

Such prayer is exceedingly fruitful because we're praying God's very words back to him! I think that's what Jesus meant we said, "*if you ask me anything in my name I will do it.*" To pray in Jesus' name is to come to the Father thru Jesus the Son, and then it's to make requests based on his character, his mission, his Word.

Doesn't that make prayer a little easier? After a while, what do you pray about? How many times can you pray for Aunt Martha who stubbed her toe? You know what I'm saying?

I'm not saying we shouldn't persist in some prayers.

There are some things we must persistently pray for until heaven moves.

→ *the salvation of loved ones; the softening of a mission field; the repentance of a prodigal Christian; the unity of the church; and many others*

But beyond those few requests, for what do we pray? What do we confess? Without meditation, our prayers often reduce to *Lord, bless Bill, Tommy, Sarah and Jane*

The key to ongoing, vibrant, transformative prayer is to meditate on a verse until we sense that God is saying something to us that we ought to respond to with prayer.

Meditation is not about filling in the blanks of a study guide. That's another disc: **study**. In meditation, you're listening to God speak, you're savoring every word, and then reflecting on it in your own heart and thinking out the implications until the Bible becomes a burning bush out of which God is speaking to you **directly**.

You're hearing the Word in your innermost being and then responding in appropriate prayer. After you meditate, you must respond with prayer or it's not a fruitful, transformative discipline. I've heard it said several times, "just as prayer without meditation is lukewarm, meditation without prayer is fruitless". Or as **Ken Gire says in *The Divine Embrace***, "*to meditate without prayerfully responding is like chewing the food but never swallowing.*"

III. The Practice

How do you do this? Think of the metaphor: a tree drawing from streams of water.

Meditation is drawing up the Word of God into yourself the way a tree draws water in to itself thru the roots.

1. Upon what do we draw? “The Law of the Lord.”

Is that the 10 commandments or the 5 books of Moses? No. The entire OT is the law (Torah). That’s why Jesus refers to the Psalms as Law in **John 10:34**.

The object of our meditation is the Word of God. Unlike forms of meditation that tell you to empty your mind or contemplate nature, Christian meditation wants you to fill your mind with sacred scripture.

And in case we miss this, God punctuates this with a humongous exclamation mark. It’s called **Psalm 119, longest chapter in the bible → a Psalm that extols the virtue of scripture.**

Vs 97 “*Oh how I love your law; I meditate on it all day long.*”

Vs 130 “*The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple*”

Vs 140 “*Your promises have been thoroughly tested and your servant loves them*”

I think you get the point. Upon what do we meditate? The Word of God.

2. How do we draw on the law? Slowwwwwwly.

Think of the image: the tree; the roots. Meditation is as slow and steady as the process by which the roots draw moisture from the flowing stream. The roots don’t slurp down the water like a kid drinking a malted. It draws it in slowly.

There are no *Evelyn Wood courses in speed meditation*.

Meditation draws in the Word *slowly and repeatedly and asks questions of it*: if that verse is true, if that word is true, what does it mean in my marriage? Etc.

That’s why you shouldn’t read scripture too fast.

Madame Guyon (17th century French mystic) wrote:

If you read scripture quickly, it will benefit you little. You will be like a bee that merely skims the surface of a flower. Instead, in this new way of reading with prayer, you must become as the bee who penetrates into the depths of the flower. You plunge deeply within to remove its deepest nectar.

We need to slow down and savor the word so that we can feel it and taste it and touch it and make it real so that it works itself into the nooks and crannies of our lives. When you’re meditating, you don’t read scripture like you read email. Sometimes you may live with one verse for an entire day!

Martin Luther used an acronym: **T-A-C-S. This is what he did with each verse:**

- what does it **teach** me? How can I **adore** God on the basis of this text? What does this text want me to **confess**? What does this text compel me to pray for (**supplicate**)?

You work through a passage verse by verse, word by word, applying **TACS**, until your heart is stirred and the word comes alive within. **Remember: the goal is not for us to get through the scripture. The goal is to get the scripture through us.**

God doesn't have a great big Behavior Modification chart on some great refrigerator of heaven, and each time you make it through another chapter of the bible, you get a gold star. Slow and deliberate and prayerfully.

3. When do you do this? "Day and night"

Wow, day and night, does that mean 24/7? No. It means we do it in a disciplined way.

Take a text in the AM, take a text at midday, and take a text in the evening. Work it through you. **[Explain ancient practice of the Daily Office].**

If you're using the weekly verses we print in the bulletin each week, you can use the Psalm in the AM and the other passage at night. Read it slowly. And as you come upon a verse that stands out to you. **STOP.** Read it again. Begin to pray.

So this is anthr disc of grace – meditation. Are you doing it? Work at it. Let's pray.

Living illustration: Chris Loo.

Disciplines of Grace

Fasting-Prayer

If you have your bible, turn with me to **Matthew ch 6, vs 16-18**.

We are in a series on spiritual formation and we're looking at those processes, those disciplines, those means of grace that will bring about supernaturally changed hearts. And we've already looked at the disciplines of silence, solitude, and meditation.

Today we're going to look at another disc of grace, *fasting*. Now that's not a subject you hear much about in evangelical churches these days. In fact, it wasn't until a Quaker by the name of **Richard Foster** wrote a book called *The Celebration of Discipline* 30 yrs ago that the issue of fasting & some other disciplines were brought to the mind of the evangelical world. Since then there's been an explosion of such books, many of which I have read in the past 3 months.

Now I'm going to be perfectly honest with you: I hate fasting. It's my least favorite & least practiced of all the spiritual disciplines. The thought of going without food for 24 hrs or 36 hrs or 3 days or 7 days or 40 days as some have done is not a pleasant thing. After a day without food & coffee, the lack of calories conspires with my caffeine habit to attack my brain with a headache of biblical proportions. The early part of a fast is particularly uncomfortable. And what is more, I enjoy food. My wife is a wonderful cook & an even better baker. That's why I wish fasting wasn't so deeply rooted in the history of God's people. Then I could ignore it. But I can't ignore it. It's too prevalent, and frankly, it's too important. And if we're going to be serious about spiritual formation & transformation, well, fasting will have to be part of it.

Fasting is explicitly **described & prescribed** over 77 times in the scripture of the old & new testaments. 77 times! But how many sermons have you heard on fasting? Probably not too many. So we may be treading upon new ground for many of us.

Now the best starting point for a study on fasting is the Sermon on the Mount. In **Mt 6**. Jesus gives instructions to his disciples on 3 related duties: *giving to needy, prayer & fasting*. In each case, Jesus contrasts the actions of hypocrites with the actions he desires from his followers. Each time, Jesus warns about unnecessary ostentation. Don't do it for show.

But with this one qualification, He then assumes that his disciples will practice these duties: *helping the needy, praying & fasting*.

- in **vs 2**, he says, "*when you give to the needy*"
- in **vs 5**, he says, "*when you pray.*"
- in **vs 16**, he says, "*when you fast.*"

And that's our 1st point this AM: **Fasting is a normal part of a healthy Christian experience**

In no case does Jesus say “if.” Jesus assumes that NT believers will follow the example of their OT counterparts by giving, praying & fasting.

Check out this list from the Who’s Who of Fasting: *Moses fasted, as did Samson, Samuel, Hannah when she prayed for a child, Saul, Jonathan, David, Elijah after his victory over Jezebel, Jehoshaphat, Ezra when he was mourning Israel’s faithlessness, Nehemiah fasted for days when he heard about the condition of Jerusalem, Esther fasted when God’s people were threatened with extermination, Daniel, the people of Nineveh, including the cattle, involuntarily no doubt, John the Baptist, Anna, prophets & teachers at Antioch, apostle Paul, & most significantly, our Lord Jesus.*

Do you remember how Jesus began his ministry? A 40 day fast.

Compare Jesus before fast (full of HS) with Jesus after fast (in the power of the HS).

Now that’s a list of some pretty impressive folks. Let’s add some heavy hitters to it: *Wesley & Whitefield, Calvin & Luther, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards & Charles Spurgeon all fasted.*

They all understood the significance of fasting. There was only one time when Jesus told his disciples not to fast. **Turn to Mt 9:14-15. Look at v 14.**

The disciples of John come to Jesus & said, “*why do we fast but your guys don’t fast? I mean, we fast all the time. John fasted. Even the unrighteous Pharisees fast. What’s wrong with your guys?*”

I love Jesus’ answer. **Look at v 15.** Jesus says, they don’t fast because I’m here. You don’t fast if the Messiah is here. You feast. But then he says: “*when the bridegroom is taken away, then they will fast. When I go, then they will fast.*” And that’s exactly what you find in the NT.

Fasting is never commanded. Jesus doesn’t say, “*fast!*” He simply assumes that it will be part of the life of a person who is part of the kingdom and who wants to discipline himself, or train herself, for the purpose of godliness, assuming that you’re physically able to do. It’s probably not a good idea for expectant mothers or diabetics or the very poor to go without food.

Fasting is a voluntary act undertaken for very specific reasons. There was only 1 appointed fast. And that was on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, when sacrifices were made for the sins of the people for the year past. **You find it in Lev 16.** It occurred every year & everyone in Israel had to participate. From sunrise to sunset, everyone fasted. That is the only compulsory fast in scripture. Every other fast was voluntary. It was up to the individual to determine whether or not to enter in to them. And since we don’t celebrate the Day of Atonement any longer now that Christ has been sacrificed for sin once for all, every fast is voluntary.

And yet, the bible is filled with examples of people, churches & even nations fasting voluntarily.

The most common kind of fast we find in the bible is what we might call a ***regular fast***

- abstaining from food, but not water, for the daylight hours of a day

A 2nd kind of fast you find in the bible is a ***partial fast***.

- in a partial fast, like the one you find in **Dan 1:12**, you abstain from certain kinds of food; Daniel chose to limit his diet to vegetables & water.

A 3rd kind of fast, ***an absolute fast***.

- it's a fast where a person does not take any food or drink, even water, for a period of time
- Ezra engaged in an ***absolute fast*** according to **Ezra 10:6**

And then there are examples of ***supernatural fasts*** → 40 days without food or water.

- Moses did that according to **Dt 9:9** when he went up on the mountain to receive the Law
- Moses could not have done that unless God enabled him to do it without dying.
- So don't try this at home. Moses didn't choose this fast. God called him to it.

The fasting we see in **Mt 6** is more of a ***private fast***. A ***private fast*** is done when an individual, secretly & discreetly, abstains from food & drink in some form for some period of time.

There are also ***congregational fasts***, like the one we see in Antioch in **Ac 13**. And there were ***national fasts*** as well in the OT. And not only did the children of Israel participate in those, but even unbelieving nations did, like Nineveh when they repented at the preaching of Jonah, to reflect their repentance & humility before YHWH.

So you see, aside from the one compulsory fast on Yom Kippur, all other fasts were voluntary. Fasting is up to you in your relationship with God to determine whether or not you will enter in to them. There's no real structure to fasting. You can do it for 1 meal or 2 meals or 3; 3 days, or a week. You can decide if it'll be partial or total, if you'll take water or fruit juice. Wonderful flexibility.

Now I haven't done justice to all that the bible says about fasting. But this overview alone should be enough to motivate you to make fasting a part of your regular Christian experience.

It was for the OT saints. It was for the NT church. It should be for us.

Jesus didn't have to tell his disciples that fasting was normal. For them, it was. For us it has become strange. We need to cast off our ***fasting phobia*** & try this.

Now I know that the words, “*I’m not going to eat today*” strike fear into the hearts of moderns. And of course, they are supposed to. It is a solemn thing to go without. And it’s a hard thing. As soon as you say, “*I’m going to fast today*,” all you can think about is eating!

But understand that fasting is an exercise that reminds us of the truth of Jesus’ words. “*Man does not live by bread alone.*” When we fast, we’re saying that there’s something in our life more imp than bread alone. There are priorities more important than the very stuff that sustains us.

Now before we get into the **reasons** for fasting, let me address the wrong reason to fast:

II. Fasting should never be done for the sake of being noticed by others (Vs 16)

Jesus is addressing the practice of the Pharisees in his time. They made great pretense about there practice of fasting. They made themselves look as wretched & miserable & dismal as they could to let everybody know that they were fasting.

Why? So everyone would think they were so super spiritual. Hypocrisy.

Their basic motive was to be seen by others. It was an ego trip.

They’d walk thru the streets with their hair all disheveled, wearing old clothes; looking pale & glum & worn.

Now in the OT, when people were fasting, they actually donned sackcloth & ashes as if they were at a funeral because fasting was supposed to be a visible display of humility. It was a physical display that they were grieving over their sin **or** some tragedy **or** some crisis **&** were earnestly seeking God in prayer, desiring God to grant them forgiveness, desiring God to respond to their prayers of contrition & intercession. It was an outward display of an inward humility.

But in Jesus’ time, the Pharisees warped that ancient & venerable practice. They donned sackcloth & ashes, not out of spiritual interest, but so that people in the religious community would say, “*o my, how holy that man is! How spiritual! How pious! O that we could rise to such great heights of holiness & piety!*” **Jesus reserves his most blistering language for such hypocrisy! (See Matthew 23)**

It was false humility. They were so proud of their humility & they wanted everyone to know how humble & pious they were. They fasted so people would admire them. That’s a wrong reason to fast.

Are there other wrong reasons to fast? **Sure.** Look thru the books at amazon.com **or** your local bookstore. There are all different angles on it. *Fasting for health, fasting for financial success, fasting as a way of life; fasting for mental health; in eastern mysticism, mystics are very involved in fasting. Some disciples of Buddha fast as a way of receiving*

mystical revelations, though frankly it doesn't look like Buddha himself ever got near a fast, though I'm sure he did.

- everything from dropping a few pounds to looking great to feeling younger to manipulating God to making a show of your spirituality to preparation for gluttony.
- Right? If you know that tomorrow you're going to someone's home for baked ziti, chicken parm & chocolate cake, to prepare for that, you fast today. You think, ***kill 2 birds with 1 stone; I get credit for a fast and I lose a few pounds in the process***

But this is not a biblical approach to fasting. In scripture, the discipline of fasting is never for physical reasons, to lose weight or to get the body beautiful.

Now we're reminded here that our performance of all religious duties, whether we're fasting **or** going to a prayer meeting **or** to an outreach **or** on a missions trip **or** to a special gathering, whether we're giving our tithes and offerings **or** making a financial pledge **or** engaging in some service to the Lord, **none of those things** should be done in such a way that they exalt ourselves or parade our righteousness. We ought never to do them so that people will praise us.

Oh, I know how tempting it is to want to get your picture in the slide show from the mission's trip & I know how tempting it is *sometimes* to engage in some service in the church because we know what people will think of us if we don't do it. "*Why, if I don't participate in that project, what will people think of me? What will Pr Gary think? If I don't go to that service, what will people think? If I don't go on that missions trip...if I don't put something in the plate when it comes by...if I don't go to the praise night...*" When we think like that, we are joining in with those venerable hypocrites of old.

What does Jesus mean when he says "*they have received their reward in full?*" **What reward?** The reward of being praised & admired by others. This is a great reward women and men. Very gratifying to our fallen nature.

The heart that motivates fasting, the heart that motivates any religious duty is supposed to be a heart for God. When that's our motive, the Lord sees it & rewards it.

Now that doesn't mean that if somebody finds out you're fasting, the value of your fast is destroyed. "*Oh no, someone saw me skip lunch. Woe is me, I'm ruined!*" Being seen fasting & fasting to be seen are not the same thing.

TS – So why should we fast?

III. Fasting should be done for the Father's pleasure and the good of our own souls
Look at vs 17-18 Jesus teaches us why we should fast, assuming we're able.

We should fast because we desire God's blessings on our prayers and on our spiritual endeavors.

It's interesting that in scripture, fasting is **never** an isolated practice. It is always combined with another spiritual responsibility and almost always explicitly mentioned in connection with prayer.

Fasting, above all else, is a help to prayer.

Prayer is not always linked with fasting, but fasting is always linked with prayer. You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying. That's why if you fast, make sure that you're able to set aside time during your fast to pray.

Fasting is not magical. It is not something that manipulates God into hearing & answering our prayers. *"Oh, Gary's fasting today, let me answer that prayer."*

(III) Slot machine view of fasting and the Christian life.

Rather, it is something that reminds us of how serious the matter is that we're taking before the Lord. It's a way of helping us to intensify our prayers and pursuit of God.

Now we don't have time to cover all the examples given in scripture, but we'll look at a few.

1. Fasting is used to express deep repentance and sorrow of sin

Daniel, in **Dan 9**, while reading the prophet Jeremiah, discovered that the captivity in Babylon would last 70 years. This moved him to confess not only his sins but the sins of the nation. He became so absorbed with his own sins and the sins of others that he fasted as he confessed.

Dan 9:3-5 *"So I turned to the Lord God & pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, & in sackcloth & ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:"*

Daniel is just hungering for God to see him and his nation with a pure heart. So broken by his own sins & that of others, he fasted & prayed. He was pleading with God.

There were many, many times when God's people confessed sin and fasting was part of it. What they ***hungered for*** was not food but the joining together of a severed fellowship with God.

When is the last time you or I skipped a meal because you were so broken over sin in your own life or habits that control you? When's the last time you were so stricken in your spirit over our nation which is condemned to hell without Christ? Or over your neighbors or somebody you love because you're filled with anxiety over doom that's going to come to those without Christ? When's the last time you skipped a meal to pray for the repentance of a friend who has stopped walking with the Lord?

Humiliation & confession, brokenness over sin are reasons to fast & pray.

2. Fasting is often used when seeking God's guidance

In **Ac 13:1-2**, we read that the church in Antioch was worshipping the Lord and fasting. Why were they fasting? **Vs 2 tells us:** *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"*

The **burden** that drove them as a congregation to fast was this: *"Where do we go from here as a church? Do we send out missionaries? Who should we send? Barnabas? Simeon? Lucius? Saul?"* They were fasting as a way of seeking the guidance of the HS. They were hungry enough for God's leading that they wanted to say it with the hunger of their bodies.

In reporting it this way, Luke (*I think*) wants us to see a connection **between worship, prayer and fasting on the one hand, and the decisive guidance of the Holy Spirit on the other.**

And let me tell you. That fasting and prayer meeting changed the course of history. It launched a missions movement that made Christianity the dominant religion of the Roman Empire within 2 ½ centuries and left us with 13 of the 27 books of the NT.

We see it again in **Ac 14:23** *"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."*

Before they appointed elders in the churches, they fasted & prayed. **Why?** Because they recognized that the appointment of elders and pastors is of the utmost importance & they knew how **urgent** it was to have God's guidance and to be able to hear from God. For this, fasting was necessary.

When's the last time you prayed with fasting for the direction of our church? When's the last time you prayed with fasting for some critical decision in your life? Should I marry this person? Is he God's best for me? Where to go to school? Where to relocate my family? Where to use my spiritual gift? Is there such a deep intensity in your heart that fasting is a corollary to your praying?

3. Fasting is used to express one's love and worship of God

You may remember the story of Anna in **Lk 2**. She had been married for 7 years before she was widowed. And from **Lk 2:37**, we know that she spent the rest of her life, perhaps ½ century, ministering in the house of the Lord. And we're told that she did it with fasting & prayer. For Anna, fasting was an ongoing spiritual discipline.

4. Lastly, more as a secondary purpose, fasting reveals what controls us

I don't have a verse for this so take it more as opinion than doctrine. (**Richard Foster's idea**) We tend to cover up what's inside of us with food and other good things. When we

fast from food **or** even from those neutral things that distract us, all sorts of things rise to the surface. Fasting together with prayer is like a fire that causes the dross in our lives to rise to the surface.

- if pride controls you, it is revealed in fasting
- anger, bitterness, envy, unforgiveness, fear – if they are within us, they will surface during regular seasons of fasting because in fasting we are praying & seeking the Lord with greater intensity and we are feasting on the Word of God rather a Happy Meal from McDonalds.
- It's a powerful combination: *fasting, prayer, worship, meditation done in solitude*
- Those who practice fasting as a regular discipline tell us that fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way

Concl: So what about you? Have you ever engaged in the practice of fasting with your prayer?

- Have you ever sat back & thought to yourself, *“you know, the unity at FBC is so important but it's so fragile. Satan would love nothing more than to fracture this unity and discredit the gospel. I will devote myself one time/month to fasting with prayer for the unity of FBC.”*
- Have you ever sat back and thought, *“you know, the marriages of our congregation are under assault. There are tremendous pressures, burdens and responsibilities. I see families coming apart. I will devote myself one time per month to fasting and praying for the marriages of our congregation.”*
- Have you ever thought, *“you know, each Fall we appoint deacons, trustees & coworkers. I will fast and pray one time per month that God will raise up the godly men & women he wants to be our officers.”*
- Have you thought, *“you know, missions is so vital. We need to send out not only short term missionaries in the summer but those who will make it their vocation. I will skip lunch one time per week & pray that God will raise up such people from our congregation who will go to the far-flung corners of the earth & that God would open up doors for the gospel among people who have been historically resistant to gospel.”*
- Have you ever thought to yourself, *“you know, I would love to see people converted to Christ in our services and for believers to be built up and revived and returned to their 1st love. I will fast & pray one time per month that God will do such a work in our church & in my own life.”*

Will you join me in giving yourself regularly to this spiritual discipline? If you do, as the Lord has promised, you will watch heaven's hand of blessing unfold.

Silent reflection

Living Illustration – Priscilla Mealy

Disciplines of Grace
Confession
Psalm 51

Suppose you're driving down the LIE in the dead of winter on a quiet but cold Sun. afternoon. Everything is perfect. You're mother-in-law is watching the kids. You and your wife finally have some quiet time together. Lite music is gently playing through your new Bose stereo. **And then it happens:** your Walden Pond experience is shattered because right in front of you, stretching across all 4 lanes, is a patch of ice.

And as you hit the ice and go into a slight spin, you **grip** the wheel and think back to driver's ed and what **Mr. Whatshisname** taught you about curve negotiation and threshold braking.

Do you hit the brakes or not hit the brakes? Do you turn the wheel in the direction of the skid or in a counter-direction? Or do you just close your eyes and pray for traveling mercy?

Well, it doesn't matter because at this point, you've smashed into the guardrail. But you survived! And while you're giving God thanks for his mercy, a cold chill creeps up your spine. *"My insurance company is going to hang me out to dry."*

And all you can think about as your neck begins to stiffen is what your insurance company will do to your already inflated premiums. Anticipating the worst, you prepare a list of excuses to share with your insurance company.

A few weeks later, a letter arrives from your insurance company, and when you open it you're expecting that there's going to be a hefty increase in your premium.

Only there's not. The letter inexplicably says: *"Sorry about your accident. They do happen. No worries, though. We're keeping your premium the same. Just be more careful next time."*

Called **"accident forgiveness"** and it's the hottest marketing tool in the industry. If you have a new policy **or** a clean driving record, that fender bender won't cost you a big hit on your insurance bill. As far as they're concerned, it never happened.

Now if a big greedy impersonal insurance company can offer grace, imagine what kind of grace God offers when we have a **moral, ethical or spiritual crash** on the road of life? And what if that crash isn't a **"no-fault"** accident but is a willful **"at-fault"** transgression? What kind of forgiveness, if any, can we expect then?²

We're continuing our study of the spiritual disciplines, those processes whereby we create space for the grace of God to work itself into the nooks and crannies of our lives.

² This illustration was adapted from www.homiletics.com

Not only will the practice those disciplines draw us closer to God, but they will help us overcome our overwhelming proclivity to sin.

Today we're going to explore a discipline, that if you have it, if you can do it, even if your life completely falls apart – morally, spiritually – it can be repaired, made whole again. And that discipline is ***confession or repentance***.

Sometimes people wonder, “*if I’m a Christian and God has already forgiven me, why should I have to confess? Aren’t my past, present and future sins already forgiven?*” Yes they are but that’s looking at confession the wrong way.

Unconfessed sin is one of the most destructive forces in a believer’s life. And confession is the item, the discipline that can restore, renew, heal and heighten a broken and sin-stained life.

There are many passages we can look at but **Ps 51** is perhaps the best resource we have on what the bible means by confession or repentance.

I. God Calls All Sinners to Repentance

If we’re going to get to the heart of this Psalm written by David, we need to ask 2 questions: *what has David done and what has God done*.

When we ask what David has done, we have to go back to **2 Sam 11**.

[Re-tell the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah]

That’s what this Spirit-filled man-after-God’s-own-heart did. *Adultery, murder, devaluing human life, deception, abuse of his God-given power*. **What was God’s response?**

- To destroy David? To condemn him? To remove him from office as he removed Saul?
- No. God doesn’t destroy David, he restores him.
- He sends Nathan, not to condemn David, but to call him to repentance. **Why?**

Because David thinks that the best way to deal with his sin is by covering it up, not realizing that he’s destroying himself. We do the same thing. We try to hide our sin not only from each other, but from God. And we sink even deeper into the mud.

A. Imagine the Christian businessman who checks into a motel room and reads the policy that says, “*the name of the movie you rent will not appear on your bill*.” As he reaches for the remote, he fires up a prayer, “*don’t look at me God, ok?*”

B. Imagine a student taking an exam. She’s been up all night cramming facts into her head, but she can’t recall them because she’s tired and nervous. This is a make-or-break exam. Her future depends on it. *So she looks at a cheat sheet*. Her soul is bothered but

she needs to do well on this test. So she fires up a prayer, “*Lord, don’t look at me, ok? I’ll be back with you in the AM when I read my bible. For now would you just look away?*” Her need outweighs her fear of God

This is the dynamic of the Christian life. Sinners sin. Sinners hide. Sinners try to cover themselves.

So God sent Nathan, not as a hammer to smash David, but as a friend to restore him. Why? Because it’s God’s nature to forgive and to restore fallen sinners. **Ps 51:1.** God has mercy on him because of his unfailing love and his great compassion. That’s why he sends Nathan. Because he loves David. God is merciful and full of forgiveness.

He was merciful to Adam and Eve when they sinned and broke the planet.

He was merciful to Cain when he killed his brother in anger.

He is merciful to us every time we go astray.

Now I don’t think it dawned on David what it was going to cost God to answer David’s prayer. The reason God didn’t condemn David and crush him and cast him away from his presence when he sinned is because Jesus took all that upon Himself.

Look at vs 8, 11. “*Don’t cast me from your presence.*” On the cross Jesus was forsaken by God. “*Don’t take your Holy Spirit from me.*” On the cross, the Father turned away and abandoned His Son. David felt crushed by his sins. His bones rotted. Jesus’ whole body was crushed on the cross.

You see, Jesus got all the things David asked not to get. God is not sweeping David’s sin under the carpet. He simply provided a substitute. Jesus. God pardoned David because God had already planned that all of David’s sin and the consequences for it would come down like a hammer on the head of Christ.

Obj: Now some people think God was letting David off to easy.

When we hear about God’s generous attitude toward forgiveness, we often ask—“*If God forgives so freely, does that mean I can commit any sin I want, and God will forgive me? What’s to prevent me from sinning with wild abandon?*”

The problem with that line of reasoning is that it fails to take into account the misery that comes to the sinner who sins and then covers it up.

Consider Ps 32:3-4, where David describes what it was like when he covered up his sin. “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*” David is describing the physiological response of our bodies to a troubled conscience.

Doesn’t sound like David got away with anything. Just the opposite.

The consequences alone should be enough to prevent you from doing it. What seems at 1st to be a pleasure becomes, ultimately, an inescapable prison. Ask someone who has sinned with abandon how it worked for them. I'm not just talking about sex and beer.

- The Bible says *"the wages of sin is death."*
- **In Ja 1, James says to the church,** *"after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."*
- Yes God forgives freely. God is not clutching tightly to his mercy as if we had to pry it from his fingers like a child's last cookie. Oh, but the price we pay when we indulge our sinful nature.

But there's a 2nd reason not to indulge sin. Fellowship with God is dependent on our walking in the light—on our walking in obedience to him. Sin just isn't worth the price you have to pay for it.

(III) Let's say a person loves to gossip; loves to talk about people. He gets a certain pleasure when he hears something bad about someone, and gets an even greater pleasure when he has a chance to pass the news along to someone else. Now the Bible makes it clear that it's a sin—on the same level as adultery and murder. But it's a sin that many people think they can indulge. So, day after day, this guy looks for bad things to say about others. Day after day he takes secret pleasure in the misfortune of others.

And day after day, little by little...

- He loses the joy of fellowship with Jesus.
- He loses the joy of fellowship with others—people don't trust him.
- He ruins lives with his careless words.
- His prayers are powerless.

Now, if he asks forgiveness, will God forgive him? Absolutely. But what if he goes out and gossips again the very next day, will God still forgive him? Yes! But what if he does it again? And again? Will God still forgive him? Absolutely. **You ask,** *"But isn't he getting away with something?"* Take a look at his life. He's not getting away with a thing. He's miserable.

And for those who say, *"If he's really sincere in his confession, he won't gossip again."* Is that how it works for you? You confess a sin once and you never do it again? If Jesus told Peter to forgive 70x7, limitless, it must be because God is just like that with us.

When we try to mask our sin, we groan, we fade, we bake in the heat of God's discipline. But when we confess, even our most heinous, grievous faults, God forgives and restores. That's why we need this discipline of confession. WITHOUT it, we're ruined.

So David says in **Ps 32:5** *"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin."* David is just the happiest guy in the world after he confesses.

So God calls us to confession. But how does God call us?

II. God Shows us how to Repent

What makes a good confession? When I was a kid going to confession every week, I believed that every good confession had 3 parts:

- (1) Avoid Fr. Shook. He was one tough priest. Crew cut. Never smiled.
- (2) Blame shift where possible. One time I told the priest that the reason I missed church was because my alarm clock didn't go off. He told me to get a new alarm clock.
- (3) Stay anonymous. Never go face to face → too scary. Stay behind the screen.

The components of a good confession are not complicated and they're all right here in **Ps 51:4a**

1. You must agree with God that it is against God's Word that you have sinned

He doesn't say, "*I sinned in my parents' sight or my friend's sight or the sight of my culture.*" He says, "*I have sinned in your sight. Against you, you only, have I sinned.*"

So one important step in the practice of this discipline is **self-examination**. This entails taking time each day to reflect on our thoughts, words and deeds.

Historically this was known as the *Prayer of Examen* which is basically a prayerful reflection of your experience with Jesus over a specific period of time. It's a way of examining yourself in a thorough manner and then confessing those things that surface.

- you begin by applying **Ps 139** and asking the Holy Spirit to search you and know you and test you
- then you let the Word of God be your standard. The plumb line; the straight edge.
- Martin Luther used the 10 commandments as a form to help him examine his life
- Probably the list used most often is that of the 7 deadly sins: ***pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, sloth, and gluttony.***
- And when sin surfaces, and it will, confession should be specific, concrete and particular
- "*I lied to my boss and said I was working when I wasn't because I wanted to avoid trouble*" can bring about more honesty and change than 20 variations of "*I haven't been truthful enough*"

2. You must take full responsibility for your actions

This is not easy to do. We usually try to slip out of it. What starts as a confession ends as an excuse. "*I didn't mean to yell at you, I was having a bad day. I didn't mean to hurl Molotov cocktails from the roof, but yesterday was a bad day.*"

Notice what David doesn't say in **vs 4**. There's no **BUT**.

When Adam sinned, he said, "*yes I sinned, but.*" Eve said, "*yes I sinned, but.*" King Saul said, "*yes I sinned, but I was afraid of the people.*"

David refuses to look for an excuse. He completely owns his sin. **Vs 1-3:** *my sin, my transgression, my iniquity, my transgression, my sin.*

He's not blaming his mother, his day, his wife for not sleeping with him more, his father for favoring his oldest brother, or a chemical imbalance from too many Twinkees. It's his sin, it's his fault, it's against God. PERIOD. FULL STOP. Takes full responsibility. That's confession.

But there's more to taking full responsibility. To the best of your ability, you make restitution to those you've wronged; like Zaccheus who returned all the money he stole; you ask forgiveness from God **and** from those you hurt; you grant forgiveness to someone you've resented; you return what you've stolen, to Bloomingdales or to the IRS; you get counseling to help with the behavior or attitude that is ruining your life and hurting your family. Until then you haven't taken responsibility for it.

3. Seek transformation not just forgiveness

A lot of Christians are stuck in that cycle of sin – confession – sin – confession – sin – confession – despair.

One reason for that is that they don't hate the sin enough to seek more than just forgiveness.

They may hate feeling powerless over it or even consequences of it, but they don't hate the sin itself. And as long as you don't hate the sin, you won't take radical steps to remove that tumor from your life and seek transformation.

David didn't just say *"yeah God, I did it. Forgive me. I'm sorry. I'll try harder in the future."* **Look at vs 7-10.** *"Wash me, cleanse me, blot it out, create in me a clean heart."* **What's he saying?** *"God, deal with this sin; root it out of my life; transform me!"* He doesn't want to just be forgiven. He wants to be holy. He wants to be transformed.

And that, by the way, is one of the truest signs of repentance – true repentance wants more than forgiveness, it wants holiness. David desires a heart renewal.

How does that happen? It begins with this kind of sincere, earnest prayer for transformation. You may want to add fasting to the equation. But there's more.

1. Confess to a spiritual friend. We all need a Nathan who knows us and to whom we can confess and who has the freedom to speak into our lives.
2. Bury yourself in scripture. David hid God's Word in his heart so that he might not sin.
3. Focus not only on the consequences of your actions, but on the love of God, the grief of God. Don't just think about what your sin cost you, think about what it cost God.

III. God Makes a Marvelous Promise to those who Repent

Look at vs 12, 13, 15. What happened to David?

He's got his joy back; he got his ministry back; he's teaching transgressors God's way; he's worshipping again. **Look at v 18.** He's got his leadership back, because he learned to confess his sin.

How is it with your soul today? Is there anything you need to confess to God?

- A lie you've told that has spawned other lies;
- Maybe there's an addiction in your life, a habit that's escalated; and it's beginning to affect your relationships, your family.
- Maybe it's chemical. Maybe it's abuse. Maybe it's gambling or porn or sexual immorality or a love for material things.
- Maybe you've gone too far in a dating relationship. Maybe you've broken a vow to God. Why not take the 1st step today and bring it to God in full and true confession.

Silent reflection

Living illustration – Kevin Lau.

Disciplines of Grace
Remember the Sabbath Day
Exodus 20:8-11

We are continuing today – and concluding – our study of the spiritual disciplines, those practices, those processes, those disciplines that create space in our life for the grace of God to work itself into the nooks and crannies of our being that we might live supernaturally changed lives.

And I hope you're beginning to realize that while these disciplines are by no means easy to practice with consistency, they are **crucial** to our pursuit of God, to our conformity to Christ, to our ongoing struggle with sin. Genuine spirituality is impossible without a vigorous and integrated life of personal and corporate spiritual disciplines.

Jesus understood that. A quick survey of the gospels through the lens of the disciplines reveals that Jesus engaged in all the classic disciplines, such as *solitude, silence, simplicity, study, prayer, meditation, sacrificial service, fasting, and disciple-making*. Jesus taught by his example that these practices were not optional for those who have a passion for the Father's pleasure and honor. These disciplines moved Jesus in the direction of the 2 great commandments:

- *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind*
- *you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

You and I will never wake up one AM to find ourselves suddenly spiritual. And that's because spirituality is neither instantaneous nor haphazard. Rather, it is progressively cultivated in the disciplines of the faith. There's no microwave spirituality. I popped into a service, I popped out spiritual. I popped into a 10-step course on spiritual maturity, I popped out as spiritual as Enoch whom God whisked off to heaven he was so pious.

So throughout this series, I've led you to the water. But I can't make you drink. That's up to you. I can't plant you by streams of water. It's up to you to crave the living water of God's Word. And we're going to talk about this whole matter of **desire** next Sunday.

Today we're going to look at a practice that's not traditionally considered a spiritual discipline, but one that I believe is essential to our pursuit of God, **the practice of keeping Sabbath.**

Now I'm perfectly aware that there is a **controversy** among Bible-believing Christians as to the applicability of the 4th commandment. Has it been done away with because it's part of the old covenant and the old covenant has been superseded by the new covenant? Or is there still a Sabbath principle for the people of God?

Adding to the complexity are Christians who've taken to calling Sunday the Christian Sabbath and who want Sunday treated with all the same devotion and the same prescriptions as the OT 7th day.

Not content with that are groups such as 7th Day Adventists and 7th Day Baptists who adhere to a Saturday observance of worship, and shake their fingers at us Sunday worshippers.

So what are we to make of the 4th commandment? Is it the scriptural equivalent of an **appendix**, something that was once necessary, but which is no longer needed? I don't believe so. I believe this commandment still has something to say to us today.

Our Lord Jesus said in **Mk 2:27**, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*"

[Explain Sabbath regulations in Jesus' day.]

Jesus freed the Sabbath.

Pastor Pete Scazzero of New Life Fellowship calls Sabbath rest God's secret weapon for spiritual and emotional maturity.

It's my desire today that you will come to relish the Sabbath day, that you would cherish it, revel in it, long for it, exalt in it and see it for what it is, a generous gift from the Creator – a day intended for the spiritual, emotional and physical restoration of man...and woman.

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to **Exodus 20:8-11**.

I. The Sabbath Command (see vs 8a)

The word '*Sabbath*' does not mean '*7th*' or '*Saturday*'. It means '*to cease and desist from labor.*' That's where I got that weird title for today's message. The Sabbath was the stop-working day. It was a mandatory day of rest. A day without a to-do list.

And the command here is a call to remembrance, as if we would forget. And history has proven that given enough time, we will. *Remember the Sabbath day. Remember the stop working day.*

Now this was not merely a cognitive exercise, "*oh yes, I remember there's a 7th day and it's special,*" any more than remembering your wedding anniversary means simply recalling that you were married on a particular day 14 yrs ago. As any forgetful husband can well attest, some concrete demonstration of remembrance is expected...or else. Fortunately for us men, the penalty for forgetting that day is a less severe than for forgetting the Sabbath, though not much less.

Biblical remembrance is more of an embrace of that day. There's similar terminology in the NT regarding the Lord's Supper. Paul tells us in **I Cor 11** that we are to do this in remembrance of Him. To say, "*remember the Sabbath*" is a call to enter in, to memorialize, even to re-enact the original Sabbath that God took on the 7th day of creation.

What happened on the 7th day of creation? God rested. God ceased from his work of creating.

Look at vs 11. God kept the 1st Sabbath for a number of reasons which we won't go into today. But one those reasons, I believe, was so we would have a pattern to emulate; that we might understand that there is a rhythm to life, a rhythm b/t work and rest, work and worship, work and non-work, work and celebration. **God worked. We are to work. God rested. We are to rest.**

God designed us to function according to that rhythm. When we neglect it, we function at a diminished capacity. We destroy ourselves really. I read recently that the Chinese pictograph for the word "**busy**" is composed of 2 characters: **heart and killing**. I checked it out with Meiling. Endless activity without purposeful rest kills the human heart.

Rest is an essential enzyme of life, as necessary as air. Without it, we cannot sustain the energy needed to do life. At the end of days, weeks or months without honoring the stop-working day, either we breakdown, burn out, dry-out, or our love and affection grows cold, and we can't even see where it happened.

Folks, those resources need to be replenished regularly, not once a year on a 3-week vacation, or once every 7 years on a 6-month sabbatical, but regularly.

Jesus understood that. He didn't wait until everyone had been properly cared for, until all who sought him were healed. He didn't ask permission to go. Jesus obeyed that rhythm. When the moment for rest came, the time for healing was over. He would simply stop, retire to a quiet place, and pray.

That's the incomparable character of this day. And it's indicated by the fact that the word **holy** is used to designate it. It's the 1st time the word holy is used in scr. It means to set apart, to exalt, to elevate above the usual level. ***The stop-working day is elevated above all other days.***

(III) The Sabbath day is like that fine china that comes out on special occasions. Most days, you're eating off paper plates or rubber maid dishes. Where's the fine china? Locked in a special cabinet behind bullet proof glass! Why? Because it's special. It's exalted over the other dishes. Holy.

So God says remember this day. And no fudging, any more than we fudge on adultery, idolatry, honoring mom and dad, coveting our neighbor's spouse.

Now if you were an Israelite, how would you feel about this command? Like Tony the Tiger...great!!!

They had been slaves for 400 yrs. For decades, their time had not been their own. Other people determined when they worked. Other people determined when they rested. Other people tyrannically drove them in the ground in labor, until God, the Sovereign God of heaven and earth, stands up for them and says, *“Now here’s the rule in my country. One mandatory day off every week. 7 ½ weeks of mandatory vacation every year. That’s the rule in my land.”*

Those slaves would’ve been dancing in the desert!

And in a day like ours, where we’re addicted to hurry at the individual level and in which the corporate structure and the societal structure around us drive us into incessant labor with seldom a pause for a breathe of air, there could be nothing more glorious for us either, than a mandatory day off each wk

This day is a gift, my friends. It’s a day of blessing. Turn to Is 58:13-14.

*“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath **a delight** and the Lord’s holy day honorable and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your **joy** in the Lord and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”* **From Isaiah’s perspective, the Sabbath is a delight and a cause for joy**

II. How does one keep the stop-working day? Look at vs 9-10.

Israel had 6 days to do all their productive work. But on the 7th day, they had to stop working. Now God knew some would find it difficult to stop working for a day and would even look for a loophole to get some work done. It takes faith and trust in God to stop and rest for a day.

So God includes a pre-emptive strike.

- Some might have been tempted to say *“Well, I can’t work, but that field really needs to be plowed because it’s going to rain tomorrow. I can’t work, so I’m going to dump all the work on my sons and daughters.”* **God says,** *“nor your son or daughter.”*
- Some might’ve said, *“man, that corn needs to be harvested ASAP. But me and the kids have to rest. Ahh! I’ll dump it on my servants.”* Nope. You’re going to give your servants rest too.
- *“Well, at least I can keep my domestic animals working.”* No you can’t, even your domestic animals will rest. You see, in God’s society, the whole societal order is to benefit from this day of rest.

God is very serious about this day. That’s why under the Old Covenant, there were serious consequences for violating the Sabbath.

Listen to Ex 31:14-15 *“Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For 6 days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death.”*

Seems pretty serious. God didn't want that day turned into a day like any other day. Part of it was because Israel was the only culture in those days that had a day of rest each week. Israel's neighbors knew nothing of that.

- Ancient Israel stood out for having a day dedicated to non-work. To violate the Sabbath was to become like everyone else and erode some of the distinctiveness of God's people, and along with it, God's reputation among the nations.
- God is making a name for Himself.
- God is showing His glory by sustaining his people even when they stopped working.

Not only that, but the Sabbath day was a perpetual reminder of the rest God would offer the world thru the coming reign of the Messiah. It was a shadow of things to come. And God didn't want that message blurred either.

And I also think that God guarded the Sabbath this way because he did not want to let his people destroy themselves by forgetting the Sabbath.

So how do we keep this day? How do we honor the stop working day?

One way to get at this is to try to understand how the Israelites kept the Sabbath. Now how exactly Israel did that has baffled interpreters for centuries. But this much is clear:

- God wanted it to be a day that had all the normal work-related, life-related activities of life sucked out of it so that it became a day for **rest, contemplation, worship and family.**
- they put their chores, their work, their professional advancement on hold
- God wanted the busyness that occupied people's lives put on hold for one day
- On that day, they remembered Eden and yearned for a return to Paradise lost
- On that day, they did what Adam and Eve did, they enjoyed fellowship with God

Now when we come into the NT, the deeper meaning of the Sabbath is revealed. The writer of Hebrews tells us in **Heb 4** that the Sabbath rest was a pointer, a sign of the true rest that can be ours in Christ. **Heb 4:9-11** *“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”*

In other words, the earthly rest was a shadow of the heavenly rest in Christ. That's why Jesus employed language like, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

When you come to faith in Christ, casting yourself on his mercy, asking Him for forgiveness, repenting of your sin, you find rest for your weary, burdened, restless soul. For the Christian, every day is a Sabbath.

So in that sense, the Sabbath has been fulfilled. It was a pointer to Christ, just like the temple and the sacrifices and the feasts and the priesthood. The whole system was a shadow, a pointer, an appetizer.

But that does that mean there is no longer a day of rest, a stop-working day? Do Christians have a day in which the cycle of their lives is interrupted for the purpose of worship, contemplation, rest and the enjoyment of creation? Absolutely! Christians also remember a day. The NT calls it the Lord's Day. For many people, that day is Sunday, in recognition of our Lord's resurrection. But Paul says in **Rom 14** that any day will suffice, which is particularly helpful if you're a health care professional, a firefighter, a police officer, etc and your job **requires** you to work on Sunday.

So how then do we keep the stop-working day? I want to preface this by reminding you that I am not the theological police who is going to start going down your list of Sunday activities and crossing off certain elements and penciling in others. The stop-working day should not be governed rigidly by narrow definitions of what is work and what is not work, what is allowed and what is disallowed. Quite often, what is deemed work to some is rest to another. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Having said that, that doesn't mean I won't meddle.

1. It is a day to stop and rest

The stop-working day is a day to recharge your physical, spiritual and emotional batteries. It's a day to stop whatever we normally do to live and survive, or whatever it is that dominates us the other 6 days, which for many people includes email and technology.

Several of the books I've read on Sabbath-keeping suggest that on your day, to the best of your ability, you forget about work, school, chores, laundry, balancing the checkbook, and shopping **so that** you can focus on some of the more essential things in life.

I even read, though didn't verify, that according to the Talmud tractate on marriage, the righteous couple should make love every Friday night. Sex is one of God's gifts. Enjoy it frequently. Enjoy it on your day of rest.

It's a day to slow down and to enjoy what you're often too busy to enjoy.

Theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes, "if we sum up the commandment and the reason for it, we get the following picture: God creates and shapes a rich and colorful world in order to celebrate the feast of creation with all his creatures on the Sabbath. Therefore, the Sabbath is the consummation of creation; without it, creation is incomplete and remains insignificant."

Now if I really wanted to meddle and get myself in trouble this AM, I would say something like this:

On your stop-working day: *no soccer games, hockey tournaments or little league bb games; no P/T job, no shopping, no homework, no sermon preparation for me. Keep the day exclusively for things like worship, fellowship, enjoyment, fun, works of compassion, time with your family and rest*

Of course, that's just a suggestion because we're under grace not law, and how you rest is between you and the Lord. The Sabbath is a favorite campground of legalists. There's always somebody who'll tell you what you can and cannot do. But as a father of 4 with extra-curricular activities expanding exponentially, setting aside one day when those activities cease, **IS A BLESSING.**

Wouldn't it be great if some of you had the burden to create a sports league for the local churches so that our kids wouldn't be forced to choose between Sunday school and a baseball game?

2. It is a day to celebrate and contemplate

The rest is not aimless rest, but God-centered rest. Attention is to be directed to God in a way that is more concentrated and steady than on ordinary days. That's why Sunday is still the best day for most of us.

On that day, we stop working so that we can focus on God as the source of all we have.

On every Sabbath, we should experience a sampling of something greater that awaits us. Our weekly Sabbath is a Day of Preparation for that ultimate Sabbath.

Conclusion: Pete Scazzero writes in his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, "Sabbath is like receiving the gift of a snow day every week. Stores are closed. Roads are impassable. You don't have to go to work. The family's together. Suddenly you have the gift of a day to do whatever you want. No obligations, no pressures, no responsibilities. You have permission to sleep, play a game, read a good book, have an extended quiet time with God. Few of us would ever give ourselves a "no obligation day" very often. God gives us one every 7th day." **How will you get Sabbath this week?**

Living illustration – Lauren Moy.

The Most Basic Ingredient in Spiritual Formation
A Thirst for God
Psalm 63

We've been talking for many weeks now about the disciplines of grace, those practices that help to form us spiritually. **And let me just remind you why these are essential practices for those who not only love Jesus but want to become like Jesus:**

- 1) they create space in our lives for the grace of God to transform us into the likeness of Christ

→ it's very easy to fall into 1 of 2 extremes in the Christian life: *overemphasize our role and minimize God's role* and *minimize our role and overemphasize God's role*. The biblical stance is that the spiritual life is both human and divine.
→ **Phil 2** says work out your salvation for God is at work in you
- 2) they draw us closer to Christ so that we can experience intimacy with Him
→ God meets us in solitude, in silence, in fasting with prayer, in meditation, in worship, etc
- 3) while we will struggle with our narcissist natures all our lives and will need to keep dipping into the reservoir of God's forgiveness and taking advantage of the gracious forbearance of others, *nevertheless*, these practices help us deal effectively with our overwhelming proclivity to sin. It is the way we train ourselves for godliness.

We've looked at 6 of these disciplines: *silence, solitude, fasting, meditation, confession and keeping Sabbath*. Folks, that's only the tip of the iceberg. There are more than 20 such disciplines. Now no one consistently practices all of them, and some are less meaningful for some people than others, but fidelity to the disciplines we most need in our spiritual journeys will keep us on the path and bring repeated times of personal renewal. **That is key!!!**

Now I want to wrap up this series today by talking about the most basic ingredient in spiritual formation. Why do some people live spiritually centered lives and others do not? Why do some make great strides in personal piety and godliness and others do not?

You will find among those who consistently practice the sp disc's a genuine thirst for God, a thirst for Christ, a thirst for righteousness, a thirst for intimacy with Christ. It's that thirst that leads them to the water to drink. **That's how life works.**

- If we're thirsty, we turn on the faucet.
- If we're hungry, we go to McDonalds.
- And we immediately satisfy those longings.
- That holds true in the spiritual realm: if we're thirsty for God, we'll go to the well and drink

So the question today is, Are you thirsty? Is there a longing in your heart for the presence of God in your life, a longing for greater intimacy with Christ? **I guess the most honest answer for most of us is sometimes.**

There are so many times in my own life – and I can imagine it’s true for you – when the longing just isn’t there, where I desire so many other things except this one thing. It may be a material pursuit **or** a ministerial pursuit, but not Christ Himself. I cannot say 24/7, “***I want to know Christ!***”

All of us here know...if you’ve walked with Christ for any length of time... that the Christian life is a struggle and that there are all these things pulling us in this direction and that direction, so that at times, our desire, our longing is not ultimately for God.

Why does that matter? **In Mt 5:6, Jesus said,** “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*” Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, will be filled, satisfied, happy.

Now this piques our interest because everyone wants to be filled, happy, satisfied, blessed.

(III) Our culture craves happiness.

According to Jesus, being blessed by God is a by-product of a ravenous hunger and an insatiable thirst for the righteousness of God.

Now one problem with many of us is that we hunger and thirst for the wrong things. I was drawn this week to a passage in **Jer 2**, where God instructed Jeremiah to call the people who had forsaken their relationship with the Lord back into fellowship with God. **In vs 2, God says,** “*Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.’*”

- God is saying, “*our fellowship was so wonderful and so fulfilling.*”
- What caused them to turn their hearts from him?
- **Vs 13:** “*My people have committed 2 sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*”

Does that passage describe you? Was there a time in your life when you were so close to God, and the fellowship was so wonderful and fulfilling that you couldn’t get enough of it, but it’s not like that anymore?. It pains you to admit it, but things have changed. Your passion for God has grown cold. Maybe not your passion for fellowship or your ministry, but your passion for God. **Do you know why? Jeremiah says it’s because you’re pouring your life into a broken cistern.**

- that illicit relationship that seemed so thrilling at the beginning has left you with the residual sediment of guilt and brokenness and spiritual numbness.
- The intoxicants you thought would numb your pain can't keep you from waking up again in a real world filled with pain.
- The new toy you bought, thinking it would bring you so much fun and excitement, is already boring you and you still have **58 payments left!**
- That dating relationship you thought would end your loneliness and bring you satisfaction has only added frustrations to your life and drawn you away from 1st love, Jesus
- The deep and abiding satisfaction that we long for cannot be found in the pleasures, or the promises, or the acclaim the world offers.

Just ask Muhammad Ali.

(III) Sports Illustrated once wrote a feature article on the life and boxing career of Ali. The writer visited Ali at his farm outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan and Ali took him out to the barn where he had trained for many of his title fights. There was still a boxing ring there, a heavy bag, and all the gear Ali used for training. There were also several framed pictures of Ali on the floor, leaning against the wall, pics of Ali in his prime, floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee.

And on the pictures were white streaks running down the glass. The writer glanced up at the rafters and saw that they were filled with pigeons. I'll let you conclude what those white streaks were. Embarrassed, Ali reached down with his trembling hands, and one by one turned the pictures over so they couldn't be seen. Ali then looked out the window and mumbled, *"I had the world and it was nothing. Look at me now."*

Now in contrast to all that stands David in **Ps 63**.

Vs 1 says, David says, *"O God, my soul thirsts for you."* This is not primarily a thirst for any of God's gifts. It is a thirst for the actual presence of God, the experience of God, intimacy with God

He makes this even more explicit in **vs 3**: *"Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you."* David wanted God more than he wanted life. He wanted God more than he wanted all the joys of this life—family, health, food, friendship, sex, job-satisfaction, books, music, the palace, sunsets, fall colors. When David says that the love of God is better than life and therefore better than all the beauty that life means, he's not denying that these things come from the love of God. He is warning us, rather, that if our hearts settle on the beauty of the gift and do not yearn for the infinitely greater beauty of the Giver, then we will ultimately end up dissatisfied.

Now I wonder if you can possibly imagine where David is when he says these words. Look at the superscription of this Psalm: *"A Psalm of David. When he was in the desert of Judah."*

David is in the wilderness. This was not the time when he was running for his life from Saul. This was the time of Absalom's revolt against him. You'll remember that his son, Absalom, drove David out of Jerusalem, out of his palace, out of his capital, away from the temple, away from the courts of Zion and out into the wilderness.

And this all stems from his one night stand with Bathsheba. One night of pleasure; a lifetime of pain. **Consequences even though forgiven.**

Many commentators believe this is when he wrote **Ps 63**, when all the legs had been kicked out from under him. And the worst part for David is not losing the throne or the treasury or the harem, but being separated from the immediate personal presence of the transcendent God. **David wants God.**

Think about that. David's longing forces upon us a question: ***what do we really want?***

David wants God, but what do we really want? What do we crave? Where is our security? It's ultimately a quest of worship. What do you worship? It's not hard to tell. Just follow the trail of your time and your affection and your energy and your money and your allegiance and your desire and at the end of that trail is a throne and on that throne is your god.

- **I think for many adults, it's money**
- **When you're young, it's sex appeal...for many.**
- **If it's not money or sex appeal, then it's power**
- And if it's not money or sex appeal or power, then you're liable to find it in your ministry, in our service to others.

But it's all so fleeting.

Sex appeal is fleeting.

- Eventually it's gone.
- Gravity and time are killers.

What about power?

- Ask Saddam Hussein.

What about ministry?

- You're adored and appreciated in your day, but when you're gone, you're forgotten, faster than you'd like to admit.

David is in this crisis. He's facing death. But he doesn't want the perks. He has an insatiable thirst for God. He thirsts for God the way a thirsty man craves water. **Why? V5**

Only God can satisfy his soul. For David, God was better than life at its best. **In Ps 16:10**, he says that there are eternal pleasures in His right hand.

And so David craved God. So should we because God offers us a feast in his presence. **Listen to this invitation in Is 55:1-2** *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."*

How do you buy something without money? **It's free.** What God offers can't be bought with gold or silver or paper. Yet still we opt for broken cisterns that ultimately leave us bored and dissatisfied.

Remember former heavyweight champion Evander "Real Deal" Holyfield? During his career, he earned a staggering 205 million dollars in prize money. He lives in a 54,000 sq ft mansion. He's an avid collector of cars. He has a stable full of thoroughbred horses worth millions. His estate is situated on hundreds of acres and on which he built a baseball diamond, miles of horse trails and motorcycle trails. He owns restaurants that bear his name. And yet, with all that, he continued to box well into his 40's, long past his prime. **Why?**

In an interview with Christian author Gary Thomas before one of his last fights, he confessed, *"I continue to fight because I'm bored."*

Broken cisterns, unable to satisfy. David says, *"my soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods."* He finds all of his longings and more met in God. **William Guthrie, the Puritan's Puritan, once said,** *"It's the experience of the Christian to be able to say of Christ, less would not satisfy, more is not desired."*

David was desperate to return to the temple, not because God was somehow held prisoner in the temple in Jerusalem. But because the ark was the symbol of immediate personal presence of God. Upon that box, over that mercy seat, between the wings of the cherubim, shone the Shekinah, the glory of God, the presence of God.

That's what David craved. Intimacy with God. To be in God's presence.

Is that what you crave? Is that where you find your satisfaction and joy?

The question for us this morning is how do we get that passion back, if indeed it's been lost? David helps us. Let me share just a few ideas and we'll be done.

1. Embrace the wilderness as the grace of God

I wonder whether this Psalm is here to remind us that we cannot do without the wilderness experiences in life. If all of life were a paradise, would we not much more often become addicted to savoring the gifts of God rather than to God Himself?

Surely that's why God takes his loved ones again and again through the desert fires. That he would disenchant us with the world and give us a taste for eternity.

God gives us the wilderness to wean us from the most precious things in the world, even those good gifts that so easily become substitutes for the living God.

How do we embrace the wilderness? By not anesthetizing and intoxicating ourselves to take the edge off. Embrace the wilderness as a gift from God, yield to it, ask God to use it to wean you from whatever it is that captivates your heart. Don't run from the pain. Find God in the midst.

2. Meditate on the attributes of God (vs 2)

What's David saying? "I have seen God in the sanctuary, temple." What does he see?

The word "*seen*" speaks of prophetic insight, not physical sight. I have seen with insight. It's a vision of God that sustains David.

It's reminiscent of Isaiah's vision of YHWH in the temple. In a vision, David sees the sanctuary. In the sanctuary, were symbols, emblems, that remind David of God's overwhelming power and magnificent glory and limitless love. This vision fuels his thirst for God.

There was the ark of the covenant with the cherubim and they spoke of God's otherness with his power and his glory. And under it was the chest and in the chest was the 10 commandments of God's transcendent moral will which can never be broken. There was the pot of manna that reminded Israel that God sustained them thru an awful wilderness. There was Aaron's rod, the reminder that God chose a priesthood for the people. He sees these symbols that he sees and reflects on them.

And then he articulates the attributes of God that these emblems speak of, "*I beheld your power and your glory and your love that is better than life.*"

- power without love is tyranny and love without power is weakness.
- He needs both. He sees both.

Application: We have to reflect upon God, his power and his glory and his love. And we have so much better than the ark and the mercy seat. We have Christ. We know that he died for us. We know he loves you. He died for you. And power? He rose from the dead! Talk about power. He's building his church and the gates of hell have not prevailed against it. Reflect upon it.

Your thirst will follow your meditation on the attributes of God, particularly as they coalesce at the cross of X. Let me oversimplify this: read your bible. It can awaken you from your slumber. It can revive you. In **Ps 19:7**, David wrote, *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”*

3. Remember your past experiences with God (see vs 6)

He remembers God. Why do we stumble? Our greatest problem is that we forget all that God has done for us. On my bed, I remember you. I think of you. I think of how you called me and saved me and rescued me from self-destruction. I think of how you spared me time and again from my own foolishness. How you loved me and provided for me even when I couldn't see a way out.

And slowly God will rekindle the flame that once burned bright and clear.

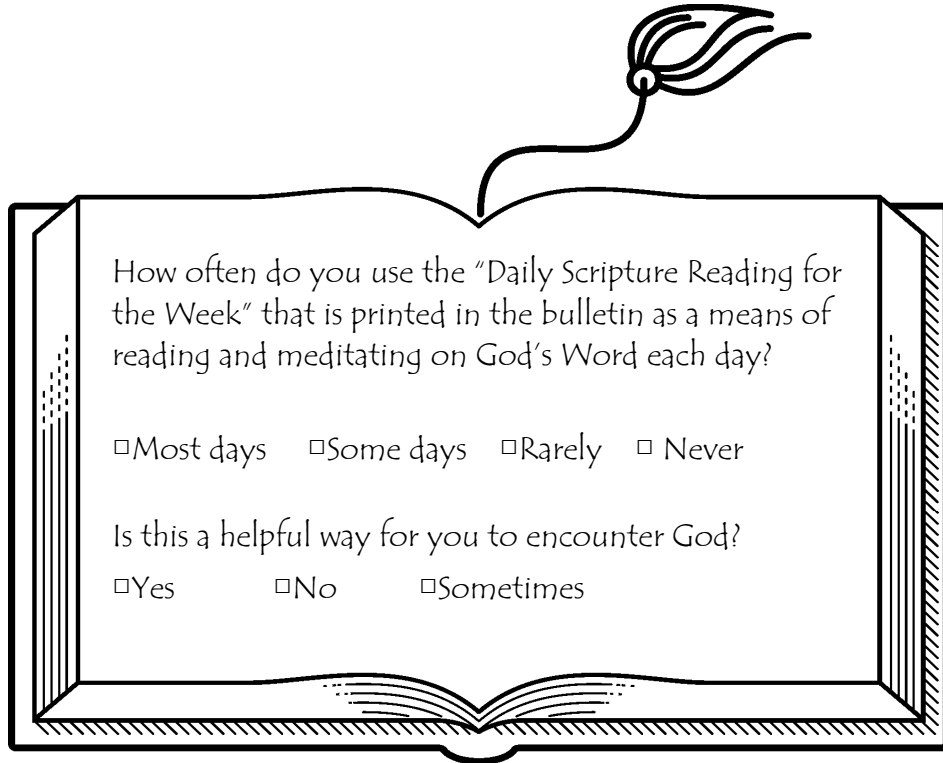
And if you have never come to Christ, God in Christ extends to you an invitation today: **In Jn 7:37-38** *Jesus said, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’”*

Stop drinking out of broken cisterns. Come to Christ. Take him by faith. Repent of your sins and believe. He can satisfy your thirst.

Rev 22:17 *“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”* The promise is always the same: if you're thirsty, come to Jesus.

APPENDIX 7

Bible Reading Plan Congregational Survey



How often do you use the "Daily Scripture Reading for the Week" that is printed in the bulletin as a means of reading and meditating on God's Word each day?

☐ Most days ☐ Some days ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Is this a helpful way for you to encounter God?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

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